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Happiness Audit Among Female Students in a Higher Education Institution, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, India

By S. Poulpunitha¹, K. Manimekalai², P. Veeramani³

“Happiness is neither a frivolity nor a luxury. It is a deep-seated yearning shared by all members of the human family.”

– UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 2014

Abstract

Students can play an important role in improving and strengthening their society. During college, women gain vast amounts of knowledge and experience, and it also provides them with the best opportunity to prepare for their careers. Students are powerful human resources who are destined to decide the future of any country. In this modern era, the lives of students have become more competitive and they have become mere athletes in an academic race. There is an increased emphasis on measuring the talent of a student primarily through academic outcomes. The mental health of students is an important and necessary factor for achieving a better life, social welfare, and logical compatibility with life events. This fact must be given its due importance, but it is unfortunately completely ignored by many institutions. From the above statements, it is clear that happiness plays a paramount role in the well-being of students. In this context, a happiness audit was conducted among female students pursuing higher education at Alagappa University in Karaikudi, India.

Keywords: Female students, higher education, happiness, academic performance, stress, well-being, Indian education, women in higher education

Introduction

Students have to cope with psychosocial changes that are connected to the development of an autonomous personal life, and additionally, they have to meet the academic and social demands that they encounter in their university studies and in their preparation for professional careers.

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Therefore, this period of education is regarded by many as important for the development of systems and intervention methods that may prevent or reduce mental health problems (Gjerde, 1993).

Educational researchers are only beginning to explore the relationship between happiness and academic achievement. Most of the research shows that students who hold a pro-social orientation experience greater well-being, are more likely to persevere in tedious academic tasks, and stay on track for college. Moreover, teachers who encourage their students toward this kind of approach to life are, once again, laying the foundation for happy and meaningful lives. These results suggest that there is an important relationship between happiness and academic achievement.

The main factors associated with well-being relationships with friends and family, physical health, and community. Research with adolescents has revealed the importance of happiness in school as well as in the home and community (Huebner, Gilman, & Suldo, 2006). For example, students reporting greater happiness also show more appropriate classroom behaviour, higher grades, better peer and teacher relationships, better physical health, and greater participation in classroom and extracurricular activities. Students who report low levels of happiness are more likely to experience mental health problems, peer victimization, poor relationships with parents and teachers, and a variety of risk behaviours (e.g. alcohol and drug use, risky sexual behaviour, violence-related behaviour, eating problems, and suicide ideation).

Happiness

“Happiness,” as a word in the English language, may not always have the exact same meaning as the words in other languages used to translate it. The English word “happiness” comes from the noun “hap”: what just happens, chance, luck—good or bad. It came to mean having good hap. There is a large amount of etymological residue in our present use of the word. In common present use, “happy” has to do with both one’s situation (one is fortunate) and one’s state of mind (one is glad, cheerful, content). In this usage, to be “happy” is to be glad or satisfied or content (a suggestion thereof subjectivity) with having a good measure of what one regards as important in life (a suggestion thereof objectivity). These two elements, situation and state of mind, can, of course, appear in different proportions in different cases.

Happiness is a very important factor in human life. Happiness has been considered as a major life goal in common philosophy. Happiness is defined as a multidimensional component of unconscious, cognitive, and motivational processes that are unique to how life is interpreted and received by individuals (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2005). Despite its significance, the concept of achieving true happiness remains ill-defined, elusive, and ungraspable.

Happiness and well-being have recently received increased attention from researchers and policymakers alike (Diener, 2006). Individuals might give different answers to the question “What is happiness?” or “What defines a satisfying life?”, but most would agree that the word happiness should be high on the list for what constitutes a good life.

Related Reviews

Kaur et al. (2014) conducted research and published the findings in the article “Happiness among Indian and Canadian university students: A comparative study” The sample consisted of 182 university students purposively selected from each location, Delhi, India and Ontario, Canada.

Findings indicate a significant difference in the happiness of Indian and Canadian university students: Canadian university students were found to be happier than their Indian counterparts. A significant difference also exists in the happiness of Indian university female students and Canadian university female students, with Canadian female university students found to be happier than their Indian counterparts.

Martin (2010) published her research in “Life satisfaction and perception of happiness among university students” The respondents of the study varied in age from 17-29 years old. It was found that there was a slight difference between the concept of happiness and life satisfaction among the university students. The results also showed that happiness and life satisfaction are significantly associated with three sub-scales: meaning, engagement, and pleasure. The data explained that pleasure is the source of happiness among students.

Demirbatir et al. (2013) conducted research published in “The Psychological Well-Being, Happiness and Life Satisfaction of Music Students.” They used a Satisfaction with Life Scale with a range of 5-35 points. In this study, every students scored approximately 21-22 points, indicating a moderate level of life satisfaction. Statistically, no significant difference was found between the measurements of life satisfaction scores. Except for economic status, there were no significant relationships between the life satisfaction score and other socio-demographic characteristics of the students. Students who reported that they had a good or moderate economic status scored higher life satisfaction scores than those with a poor economic status within both the measurements.

Bitsika (2010) conducted an investigation among 200 students at a private university in Austria that showed that symptoms of fatigue, anxiety, and insomnia were more prevalent among female students than male students.

Calaguas (2011) examined the perception of academic stress among college students in a state college in the Philippines. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, an indigenous survey instrument was developed. A total of 1,210 college students, chosen through systematic random sampling, responded to the survey instrument. Statistical analyses showed that male and female respondents differed significantly in their perceptions of subject, teacher, schedule, classroom, and expectation-related stressors but did not significantly differ in their perceptions of enrolment and admissions, classmates, and finance-related stressors.

Statement of the problem

Among the four stages of life, the student stage is the most precious part in every individuals life, as it offers vast amounts of knowledge and experience which help students to decide the kind of life and career they would like to pursue. Today, education has become an industry for human resource development to cultivate future employees from all walks of life. Students constitute the heart of the education system and they are the ones most affected by the strengths and weaknesses of the education system. The student body can be seen as a microcosm of the larger society. Some of the most common risks faced by students during their time in college are psychological, emotional, social, academic, and career-related issues. In recent years, there has been an alarming increase in stress levels among the college student population (Pierceall & Keim, 2007). Thus, stress poses a significant public health problem for many students due to the various academic, social, and personal challenges they may encounter, produced by the college environment. Importance has not been given to the happiness of students studying in schools and colleges as compared to other problems of adolescents. Thus the current study is very essential in knowing the level of happiness among college students.

Scope and importance of the study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the level of happiness among female students at Alagappa University. The study of female students' happiness is important for two reasons: first, we can understand their level of satisfaction with various facilities and activities provided by the University; and second, the sources of unhappiness can be identified from this study, and intervention can be provided.

Objectives of the study

1. To assess whether there is a positive campus environment
2. To know the impact of physical and psychological well-being on the happiness of female students
3. To identify the factors causing stress among female students

Research methodology

Research Design

A research design is the detailed plan of an investigation. It is the blueprint of the procedures for obtaining and analyzing data. A descriptive research design has been adopted for this study. The purpose of this research design is to describe the happiness of respondents at the University and other factors causing happiness such as level of satisfaction, a positive environment of the campus, physical and psychological well-being, stress, and so on.

The universe of the Study

To find out the degree of happiness among female students at Alagappa University, the entire female students was selected for the study. The study universe comprises of 26 departments, which are broadly categorized into 4 major divisions: Arts, Science, Management, and Education. Out of the total number of students (2,576) there were 1,866 women studying in the university during the academic year 2015-16. The population of the study is 1,866 female students.

Sample Size

The sample size of the study is 466 female students, which is one-fourth of the entire female student population of the university.

Table - 1. Positive Campus Environment

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not applicable	Total
	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp
I am happy with the classroom infrastructure	27 (5.8%)	30 (6.4%)	45 (9.7%)	257 (56.2%)	107 (23%)	-	466 (100%)
I am happy with the clean environment on campus	23 (4.9%)	36 (7.7%)	39 (8.4%)	253 (54.3%)	115 (24.7%)	-	466 (100%)
There is a friendly relationship between teachers and students	24 (5.2%)	15 (3.2%)	37 (7.9%)	275 (59%)	115 (24.7%)	-	466 (100%)
There is good communication between the students and staff	15 (3.2%)	19 (4.1%)	29 (6.2%)	284 (60.9%)	119 (25.5%)	-	466 (100%)
The staff understand the students' needs	18 (3.9%)	24 (5.2%)	60 (12.9%)	250 (53.6%)	114 (24.5%)	-	466 (100%)
The staff motivate the students	16 (3.4%)	10 (2.1%)	19 (4.1%)	265 (56.9%)	156 (33.5%)	-	466 (100%)
Female students get respect from male students	20 (4.3%)	42 (9%)	29 (6.2%)	252 (54.1%)	123 (26.4%)	-	466 (100%)
There is a healthy relationship between men and women	24 (5.2%)	43 (9.2%)	28 (6%)	267 (57.3%)	104 (22.3%)	-	466 (100%)
We have the freedom to make decisions and our decisions are accepted by others	15 (3.2%)	30 (6.4%)	81 (17.4%)	250 (53.6%)	90 (19.3%)	-	466 (100%)
There is a good relationship between the students and the hostel warden	4 (3.5%)	10 (8.8%)	11 (9.7%)	61 (54%)	27 (23.9%)	353 (75.8%)	466 (100%)

Students in the process of socialization require a healthy environment and perfect role models so as to increase their performance. Since colleges influence students' personalities, the physical space of the college campus becomes an important element for learning and education. The above table shows the view of the female students on positive campus Environment.

a) I am happy with the classroom infrastructure

Significantly, a majority (56%) of the respondents agreed and 23% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they are happy with the classroom infrastructure at the university.

b) I am happy with the clean environment on campus

Out of the total sample respondents, a significant majority (54%) of the respondents agreed and 25% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement of being happy with the clean environment on campus.

c) There is a friendly relationship between teachers and students

For the statement “There is a friendly relationship between teachers and students,” 59% of the respondents agreed, followed by 25% of them who strongly agreed. Therefore, it is seen that a friendly relationship exists between teachers and the students at the university.

d) There is good communication between the students and staff

Among the total sample population, the majority (61%) of respondents agreed and 26% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that there is good communication between the students and staff. The staff includes teaching, non-teaching, and other administrative staff at the university.

e) The staff understand the students' needs

Out of the total sample respondents, 54% of the respondents agreed and 25% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the staff understand the students' needs.

f) The staff motivates the students

The highest percentage of the respondents (57%) agreed and 34% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the staff motivate the students.

g) Getting respect from the male students

Out of the total sample respondents, the majority (54%) of the respondents agreed, 26% of the respondents strongly agreed, and only 4% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement that female students get respect from male students. It is understood that the male students show no difference or disrespect towards the female students.

h) There is a healthy relationship between men and women

For the statement “There is a healthy relationship between men and women,” 57% of the respondents agreed and 22% of the respondents strongly agreed. Therefore, it is clear that there is a healthy relationship between male and female students.

i) We have the freedom to make decisions and our decisions are accepted by others

Out of the total sample respondents, a significant majority (54%) of the respondents agreed and 19% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they have the freedom to make decisions and their decisions are accepted by others.

j) There is a good relationship between the students and dormitory

Out of the total sample respondents, 76% of the respondents did not stay in the campus hostel, and thus this statement did not apply to them. Out of total respondents who did stay in the hostel, 54% of the respondents agreed with the statement that there is a good relationship between the students and hostel warden. This shows that the hostel students are comfortable with their warden.

This study was conducted before the NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) Visit to Alagappa University. Students' statements with regard to the positive campus environment and physical and psychological well-being are further strengthened by the NAAC grading. During the period 2017-18, Alagappa University was the only university in the entire state to get the highest grade (at that time) of A+. One of the components for this achievement of University is the effective contribution and the facilities provided to them.

Table – 2. Impact of Physical and Psychological Well-being on Students' Happiness

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp
I think I am very healthy	12 (2.6%)	90 (19.3%)	49 (10.5%)	225 (48.3%)	90 (19.3%)	466 (100%)
I have lot of energy to perform well in both academic as well as extra-curricular activities	14 (3%)	109 (23.4%)	69 (14.8%)	198 (42.5%)	76 (16.3%)	466 (100%)
I don't easily get tired	12 (2.6%)	133 (28.5%)	71 (15.2%)	195 (41.8%)	55 (11.8%)	466 (100%)
I don't skip my breakfast	19 (4.1%)	129 (27.7%)	43 (9.2%)	192 (41.2%)	83 (17.8%)	466 (100%)
I am sensitive	25 (5.4%)	43 (9.2%)	48 (10.3%)	297 (63.7%)	53 (11.4%)	466 (100%)
I am emotional	22 (4.7%)	62 (13.3%)	62 (13.3%)	266 (57.1%)	54 (11.6%)	466 (100%)
Often I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do	15 (3.2%)	35 (7.5%)	133 (28.5%)	219 (47%)	64 (13.7%)	466 (100%)
I am satisfied with my ability to perform my daily living activities	14 (3%)	22 (4.7%)	115 (24.7%)	228 (48.9%)	87 (18.7%)	466 (100%)
I am happy with my physical appearance	12 (2.6%)	76 (16.3%)	33 (7.1%)	215 (46.1%)	130 (27.9%)	466 (100%)
I spend lot of time in sports and recreational activities	51 (10.9%)	203 (43.6%)	74 (15.9%)	94 (20.2%)	44 (9.4%)	466 (100%)
I am a very spiritual person	15 (3.2%)	64 (13.7%)	66 (14.2%)	192 (41.2%)	129 (27.7%)	466 (100%)

The above table reveals the female students' physical and psychological well-being. Physical well-being and happiness are closely associated with each other. Studies show that people who live healthy lifestyles feel happy when compared to people who get sick often.

a) I think I am very healthy

For the statement "I think I am very healthy," 48% of the respondents agreed and 19% of the respondents.

b) I have a lot of energy to perform well in both academic as well as extra-curricular activities

Out of the total sample, 43% of the respondents strongly agreed and 23% strongly disagreed with the statement that they have lot of energy to perform well in both academic and extra-curricular activities.

c) I don't easily get tired

Nearly half of the respondents 42% of the respondents strongly agreed and 29% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that they don't easily get tired.

d) I don't skip my breakfast

Eating breakfast is very important for the proper functioning of the brain. People who skip breakfast can easily develop anaemia and other sicknesses. Students at large generally skip breakfast, especially women. Thus, many female students are prone to anaemia, ulcers, and other illnesses. The current study tries to find out the details of female students who skip breakfast. 41% of the respondents strongly agreed and 28% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that they don't skip their breakfast.

e) I am sensitive

For the statement "I am sensitive," 64% of the respondents agreed. This shows that the majority of the female students are sensitive to things happening around them.

f) I am emotional

Handling emotions is a very important component of happiness. Many people are not aware of how to handle their emotions. This includes both positive and negative emotions. For the statement "I am emotional," 57% of the respondents agreed. The result shows that the majority of female students are emotional by nature. This means that they lack the knowledge of how to handle their positive and negative emotions.

g) Often I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do

A sense of accomplishment is a very important characteristic of self-esteem. This will help an individual to develop a positive attitude about themselves. Thus, a positive attitude will make them happy. This study tries to find out the sense of accomplishment of female students studying in university. The highest percentage of respondents (47%) agreed and 29% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that they often feel a sense of accomplishment from what they do.

h) I am satisfied with my ability to perform my daily living activities

Satisfaction is another essential element of happiness. The current study tries to find out the satisfaction of female students studying in Alagappa University regarding their ability to perform daily living activities. 49% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. This shows that they are satisfied with their ability to perform daily living activities.

i) I am happy with my physical appearance

Nearly half (46%) of the respondents agreed and 28% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they are happy with their physical appearance.

j) I spend a lot of time in sports and recreational activities

Participating in sports and recreational activities helps in the physical and psychological well-being of an individual. This study tries to find out the female students' interest in sports and recreational activities. 44% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. The result shows that the female students show less interest in sports and recreational activities.

k) I am a very spiritual person

Spiritual well-being is also one of the dimensions of health according to the World Health Organization. Spirituality increases personal psychological well-being. This research tries to study spirituality among the female students at University. 41% of the respondents agreed and 28% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement.

Table – 3. Stress among the Female Students

Statements	Very stressful	Moderately stressful	Less stressful	No stress at all	Total
	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp	No. of resp
Continuous class	154 (33 %)	111 (23.8%)	111 (23.8%)	90 (19.3%)	466 (100%)
Teaching method	57 (12.2%)	97 (20.8%)	145 (31.1%)	167 (35.8%)	466 (100%)
Classroom environment	70 (15%)	61 (13.1%)	149 (32%)	186 (39.9%)	466 (100%)
Teaching in English	56 (12%)	56 (12%)	110 (23.6%)	244 (52.4%)	466 (100%)
Teaching in Tamil	17 (3.6%)	74 (15.9%)	58 (12.4%)	317 (68%)	466 (100%)
Family problems	66 (14.2%)	93 (20%)	127 (27.3%)	180 (38.6%)	466 (100%)
Mode of Travel	97 (20.8%)	91 (19.5%)	108 (23.2%)	170 (36.5%)	466 (100%)
Co-education system	6 (1.3%)	71 (15.2%)	136 (29.2%)	253 (54.3%)	466 (100%)
Workload	57 (12.2%)	66 (14.2%)	177 (38%)	166 (35.6%)	466 (100%)
Harassment by staff	17 (3.6%)	62 (13.3%)	84 (18%)	303 (65%)	466 (100%)
Harassment by students	16 (3.4%)	50 (10.7%)	90 (19.3%)	310 (66.5%)	466 (100%)

Table 3 shows the stress level among female students studying at Alagappa University.

a) Continuous class

33% of the respondents felt very stressful to attend the class continuously. 24% of the respondents felt it was moderately stressful. 24% of the respondents said less stressful and 19% of the respondents felt no stress at all.

b) Teaching method

36% replied it is not stressful at all, and 33% found it stressful (12.2% very stressful and 21% moderately stressful).

c) Classroom environment

40% of the respondents said the classroom environment was no stress at all and 32% of the respondents found it less stressful.

d) Teaching in English

Out of the total sample respondents, a significant majority (52%) of the respondents found teaching in English in the classroom induced no stress and 24% of the respondents found less stress in the experience.

e) Teaching in Tamil

Of the total sample respondents, the majority (68%) of the respondents found no stress at all with being taught in Tamil in the classroom.

f) Family problems

39% of the respondents registered no stress regarding family problems, 27% of the respondents found less stress and only 14% of the respondents found it very stressful.

g) Mode of Travel

Out of the total respondents, 37% of the respondents found no stress and 21% of the respondents found it very stressful about their mode of travel to university.

h) Co-education system

A significant majority (54%) of the respondents found no stress at all with the co-education system of the University. Only 1% of the respondents found the co-education system very stressful. The result shows that the female students have no problem studying in a co-educational institution.

i) Workload

With regard to the workload provided by the department to the students, the largest portion (38%) of the respondents feel less stress about it.

j) Harassment by staff

The majority (65%) of the respondents feel no stress due to harassment by staff. 4% say it is very stressful and 13% say it is moderately stressful.

k) Harassment by students

The majority (67%) of the respondents feel no stress with regard to harassment by co-students. 3% say it is very stressful and 11% say it is moderately stressful.

Major Findings

- Significantly, a majority (56 %) of the respondents agreed with the statement that they are happy with the classroom infrastructure at the university.
- 59% of the respondents agreed with the statement, “There is a friendly relationship between teachers and students.”
- Among the total, the majority (61%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that there is good communication between the students and staff.
- Out of the total sample respondents, 54% agreed with the statement that the staff understand the students’ needs.

- Of the respondents, 57% agreed with the statement, “There is a healthy relationship between men and women.”
- Out of total respondents who stayed in the hostel, 54% agreed with the statement that there is a good relationship between the students and the hostel warden.
- 41% of the respondents agreed that their overall health status is good
- 41.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement that they don’t skip their breakfast.
- Of the respondents, 63.7% agreed with the statement, “I am sensitive.”
- Of the respondents, 57.1% agreed with the statement, “I am emotional.”
- Of the respondents, 43.6% disagreed with the statement that they spend lot of time doing sports and recreational activities.
- 35.8% of the respondents expressed no stress for the teaching method.
- The highest percentage of the respondents (39.9%) expressed no stress for the classroom environment.
- For family problems, 38.6% of the respondents expressed no stress.
- Significantly, a majority (54.3%) of the respondents found no stress at all with the co-education system of the university.

Suggestions

- Generally, motivation helps people to be successful and happy, and when people are motivated by happiness, they are likely to experience a fulfilling life. They will be motivated to continuously work for things that will make them happy. Motivation from staff inspires students to progress in their academic as well as personal lives, and this progression will make students happy on the campus at the university.
- Good education, a friendly environment, and physical and psychological well-being pave the way for happy living for students at the University. Happiness in educational institutions leads to development in students’ physical, cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions, and if damage to one of these dimensions is seen, or neglected, the student will not achieve their abilities and competencies. According to the results of this study, educational and infrastructural facilities on campus have a major impact on student happiness at the University.
- As suggested by the results, students need a proper guidance and counselling unit in the University, which would help the students in educational, emotional, social, and vocational counselling.
- The majority (60%) of the students respondents are not aware of the women empowerment cell on campus and its functions. Since 60% of the students are women, the management and the respective members of the Cell should arrange periodic meetings with the female students to discuss emerging topics such as social issues, contemporary issues, health care issues, and the safety and security of girls and women, as well as to ventilate their personal grievances. Also, the Women Empowerment Cell should be actively involved in the well-being of female students at the University.
- The happiness of students can be enhanced by creating awareness of the importance of happiness and mental health of the students.

- Life skills education can be provided to the students, which would promote both physical and psychological well-being for students
- Female students need to be encouraged to spend more time on sports and recreational activities. This will help them to overcome stress and other psychological issues, as well as to build confidence in themselves.

Be a happier student

There are all sorts of added stressors associated with being a student. Here are some helpful tips to balance your health and happiness while you are in school.

Get plenty of sleep - Not getting enough sleep impairs academic performance and makes it harder to get through the day.

- Think positive - Research has shown that positive thinking may improve physical well-being, produce lower feelings of depression, and produce lower levels of distress.
- Have a stress "outlet" - This could be a social activity like going out to watch or participate in intramural sports? finding a hobby, or joining a social club.
- Engage in relaxation techniques - This can include things like slowly counting to ten, meditation, thinking positive thoughts, visualization, or playing with a stress ball.
- Talk to someone - Sometimes just talking about what is stressful or having someone listen to your problems can drastically reduce stress.

Conclusion

Student life is a composite of many colourful, interesting experiences and a transitional period for developing their selves, values, and personality that they assume upon joining the professional world. The joy and happiness that students experience greatly influence what and who they will be as professionals. Students need to cope with physical and psychosocial changes that are connected to the development of autonomous personal life, and additionally, they have to cope with the academic and social demands that they encounter in university studies and in their preparation for professional careers. Happiness is a very important factor in human life.

Happiness has been considered a major life goal, and it is also associated with success in different life domains and is related to positive mental health. The educational environment of a university contributes a lot to the development of happiness among the students. The situations and factors of happiness vary from student to student, and therefore, it is not easy to highlight certain specific factors that can be applied to each and every student. But it is the responsibility of those in charge to provide an environment conducive to happiness for female students in order to make them potential human resources in the sustainable development of the nation.

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