Factors Affecting Student Stress Levels after a Year of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The period of Covid-19 pandemic brought about numerous life-altering events for students. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the effect of student characteristics, problems, social support, and coping strategies on stress levels after one year of the pandemic. Quantitative method was used with a cross-sectional design to obtain 879 Indonesian students through a voluntary sampling technique. The results showed that there was a significant positive effect of student characteristics and problems on stress levels. Furthermore, there is a significant negative effect of social support and coping strategies on student stress levels.

Keywords: social support, coping strategies, stress levels, Covid-19, students

Abstrak

Masa pandemi Covid-19 memberikan banyak perubahan yang berpengaruh pada berbagai aspek kehidupan, yang menjadi sebuah tantangan salah satunya bagi mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh karakteristik mahasiswa, permasalahan, dukungan sosial, dan strategi koping terhadap tingkat stres mahasiswa pasca satu tahun pandemi Covid-19. Penelitian menggunakan metode kuantitatif dengan desain *cross-sectional*. Sampel penelitian sebanyak 879 mahasiswa Indonesia yang diperoleh melalui teknik *voluntary sampling*. Hasil analisis regresi menunjukkan terdapat pengaruh positif signifikan dari karakteristik mahasiswa (jenis kelamin mahasiswa dan pendidikan ibu) serta permasalahan mahasiswa terhadap tingkat stres mahasiswa. Selain itu hasil analisis regresi juga menunjukkan terdapat pengaruh negatif signifikan dari dukungan sosial dan strategi koping terhadap tingkat stres mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: dukungan sosial, strategi koping, tingkat stres, Covid-19, mahasiswa

Introduction

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic was declared to have entered Indonesia. There are 228 countries with 418,650,474 confirmed positive and 5,856,224 dying cases of this virus (Covid-19 Handling Committee and National Economic Recovery, 2022). The pandemic has greatly impacted various parties, such as adolescents. According to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey conducted in 21 countries in the report of The State of the World's Children 2021, about 20% of adolescents in the age range 15-24 often feel depressed and have low interest in activities. Furthermore, around 1.6 billion are affected by the termination of school teaching and learning activities (UNICEF, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic period has provided many influential changes in various aspects of life, which have become a challenge for students. The Indonesian government has imposed various regulations such as wearing masks, washing hands, maintaining distance, staying away from crowds, and reducing mobility. The policy also applies in the education sector, namely the implementation of Distance Learning. Argaheni (2020) stated that the distance learning process (online) provides challenges and difficulties for students. Furthermore, students dealing with system changes feel various kinds of problems. Permatasari et al. (2021) stated that more than half felt academic pressure during the distance learning process. Some results showed that most of the students also felt anxiety at a severe level (NurCita & Susantiningsih, 2020).

The problems and difficulties can be felt lighter when students obtain good social support from their environment. Santoso (2020) explained that a person's social support is inversely related to the level of anxiety, stress, depression, and psychological pressure felt. Social support can be in the form of concern and assistance from various parties such as family, friends, and higher education institutions (Cao et al., 2020). However, research by UNICEF (2021) showed that one in four adolescents felt more distant from their family, and about 63.1% had fewer opportunities to express their opinions. The results of previous studies show that there is still insufficient social support, hence students are still experiencing these problems.

Some research shows that a person's perceived stress level is strongly affected by support from family, friends, and the workplace/school (Jianjun et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). Forms of social support are from family, friends, and a person's place of activity, such as the workplace and school. Some studies also showed that the more students perceived good social support, the lower the pressure in academic matters (Muflihah & Savira, 2021). In addition to social support, coping strategies also have a role in determining the stress or tension of a person (Rosino, 2016).

The decrease in student stress can be seen in the level of coping strategies, which are inversely proportional to the perceived academic stress (Rosa et al., 2021). As stated by Lazarus and Folkman (in Maryam, 2017), these strategies have two types, namely roblem-focused and emotion-focused. Positive feelings, active stress coping, and social support are positive predictors of a person's psychological quality of life and well-being. They are also negative predictors of stress, depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances (Budimir et al., 2021).

Martínez et al. (2020) stated that most students experienced stress while facing

changes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, stress can be seen from chronic non-specific arousal, inability to relax, easily nervous, grumpy or restless, irritable/excessive, and impatient (Vignola & Tucci, 2014). Research in the United States shows that most students feel increased stress and anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Due to social separation, individuals are scared of their health conditions and loved ones, have problems concentrating, sleep disorders, and limited social engagement (Son et al., 2020). Likewise, research in Indonesia showed that during the pandemic, students experienced stress and fatigue in various ways (Andiarna & Kusumawati, 2020; Pustikasari & Fitriyanti, 2021; Sugiyanto et al., 2019).

After one year of Covid-19 pandemic, no simultaneously captures research the characteristics, problems, social support, coping strategies, and stress levels possessed by students in Indonesia. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the different levels of these variables after one year of the pandemic. There are three hypotheses, namely: 1) student characteristics affect student stress levels, 2) student problems have a significant positive effect on student stress levels, 3) social support has a significant negative effect on students' stress levels, and 4) coping strategies have a significant negative effect on students' stress levels.

Methods

Research Design

This research uses a quantitative method with a cross-sectional design, and the collection was carried out for one month, from May 7 to June 3, 2021. Furthermore, it was conducted online, involving students from various universities in Indonesia.

Population and Sample

The population consists of active Indonesian students of both genders who come from intact families with complete and not divorced parents. It uses a voluntary sampling technique selected from prospective respondents willing and qualified to participate in the survey (Murairwa, 2015). A total of 1028 student respondents filled out the questionnaire. Based on the results of data cleaning, respondents who filled out all questionnaire items were 879 from various universities in the provinces of Banten, Lampung, West Java, Central Java, East Java, Jakarta, West Sumatra, Riau, Jambi, South Kalimantan, North Sumatra, West Nusa Tenggara, and South Sumatra.

Data Collection Technique

Data was collected by distributing online questionnaires using Google forms, and the links were distributed through social media such as Whatsapp (WA) and Instagram. Respondents filled in their answers to the questions in the questionnaire, which consists of several instruments, namely: 1) student characteristics (age, gender, last GPA, fathermother age, father-mother education, pocket money/month, college, faculty, and address), 2) student problem instruments, 3) social support instruments, 4) coping strategies, and 5) student stress levels.

Student Problem Instruments

The problems experienced were measured based on the instrument developed, consisting of 10 questions on student life during the pandemic related to internet signals, internet quotas, the concentration of online lectures, social relationships, romance, conflicts with parents, finances, health, food, and others measured by a score of 0 (No) and 1 (Yes). Based on the Kuder Richardson reliability test, the instrument has a reliability of .595, which means the consistency value of the measuring instrument is in the moderate category. The items on this measuring instrument are valid, with validity values in the range of .322 - .593.

Social Support Instruments

The social support that assisted the subject in overcoming problems consisted of 6 items with an answer score of 0 (No) and 1 (Yes). Based on the Kuder Richardson test, it has a reliability of .493, meaning the consistency value is in a low category. The social support measurement tool items are

valid with a validity value range of .415 - .690.

Coping Strategies Instruments

Respondents used the coping strategies to deal with problems during the Covid-19 pandemic. Coping strategy measurement refers to the tool from Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which was modified by adding the word "during the Covid-19 pandemic" and measured using a Likert scale (0=I never do; 1=I rarely do; 2=I do quite often; 3=I do very often). The instrument consists of 13 items with two dimensions, namely focusing on problems and emotions, with a Cronbach Alpha value of .636, meaning the consistency value is in the moderate category. Examples of items in this instrument include 1) "I explain the problem to others," 2) "I pray to God," and 3) "I watch TV, listen to the radio or read newspapers." The items are valid with validity values of .256 - .598.

Stress Level Instrument

The stress level was measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) instrument (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). This instrument assesses the aspects of difficulty relaxing, lack of enthusiasm, nervousness, grumpy/restless, irritable/ overly reactive, and impatience. It consists of 14 items on a scale of 0 to 3 (0=happens to me/ never happened at all, 1=happens to me, although not very strongly, or rarely, 2=happens to me, quite strongly, or quite often, 3=happens to me, very strongly, or very often). The Cronbach Alpha value is .875, which means the consistency is in the high category. Examples of statement items: 1) "I am easily disappointed by things that are quite trivial," 2) "I get irritated easily," and 3) "I get irritated easily." The items in this instrument are valid, with validity values in the range of .474 - .734.

Data Analysis

The data was processed using multiple linear regression analysis to examine the effect of student characteristics, problems, social support, and coping strategies in influencing stress levels. The data processing includes cleaning, coding, scoring, analysis, and interpretation. Meanwhile, the analysis consisted of 1) descriptive analysis to identify student characteristics, problems, social support, coping strategies, and stress levels, and 2) multiple regression analysis to analyze the effect of these variables on student stress levels after one year of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results and Discussion

Result

Student Characteristics

The results showed that 85.2% of students were in the age range of 20-22, with an average age of 20.35. After one year of facing the Covid-19 pandemic, 60.8% stated that they received less than Rp pocket money of 500,000// month with an average of Rp. 632,167 per month. The results show that the Average Grade Point Average (GPA) reaches a scale of 3.50 from a maximum value of 4.00 even though it is relatively small and has all the limitations during the pandemic. Almost 93.3% of students in this research had a GPA of more than 3.00 (Table 1).

The results also show the characteristics of the students' families, where 90.9% have middle-aged fathers at 41-60, averaging 52.77. Likewise, with the mother's age, 94.3% have middle-aged mothers with an average age of 48.68. Based on the parents' education, 35.2% and 37.1% have a father and mother, with the highest education being Senior High School /Madrasah Aliyah /Equivalent.

Student Problems

Based on research related to the problems felt by students, as presented in table 2, 91.5% still felt difficulty concentrating, especially when participating in distance learning. Furthermore, 52.2%, 45.5%, and 46.5% also felt problems related to social relations with friends, difficulties in participating in distance learning because the signal was not good, and financial-related problems. Table 1Distribution of Student Characteristics

Variable	Total	%
Gender		
Male	187	21.3
Female	692	78.7
Age (year)		
17-19	123	14.0
20-22	749	85.2
23-25	7	.8
Average \pm SD (year)	20.35±	.910
Min-Max (year)	17-2	
Grade Point		
< 3.00	59	6.7
\geq 3.00	820	93.3
Average \pm SD (score)	3.50±.	310
Min-Max (score)	2.36-4	
Pocket money/month (rupiah)		
< 500.000	534	60.8
500.001-2.000.000	321	36.5
2.000.001-4.000.000	15	1.7
>4.000.000	9	1.7
Average \pm SD (rupiah)	632167±83	
Min-Max (rupiah)	0-10.000	
Father's Age (years)	0-10.000	5.000
18-40 (early adult)	5	.6
41-60 (middle adult)	799	.0 90.9
>60 (late adulthood)	75	8.5
Average \pm SD (years)	52.77±5	
Min-Max (years)	32.77±3 35-7	
Mother's age (years)	55-7	0
	40	16
18-40 (early adult)	40 829	4.6 94.3
41-60 (middle adult)	829 10	
>60 (late adulthood)	10 48.68±5	1.1
Average \pm SD (years)		
Min-Max (years) Father's Education	33-6	0
No school	5	6
		.6
Elementary School/Madrasah	68	7.7
Ibtidaiyah/Equivalent	\sim	7 1
Junior High School /Madrasah	62	7.1
Tsanawiyah /Equivalent	200	25.0
Senior High School /Madrasah	309	35.2
Aliyah /Equivalent	01	10.4
Diploma 1/Diploma 2/	91	10.4
Diploma 3	240	07.0
Bachelor	240	27.3
Masters/Doctoral	104	11.8
Mother's Education		
No school	3	.3
Elementary School/Madrasah	105	11.9
Ibtidaiyah/Equivalent		-
Junior High School /Madrasah	78	8.9
Tsanawiyah /Equivalent		
Senior High School /Madrasah	326	37.1
Aliyah /Equivalent		
Diploma 1/Diploma 2/	92	10.5
Diploma 3		
Bachelor	225	25.6
Masters/Doctoral	50	5.7

Table 2Distribution of Respondents' Answers RegardingStudent Problems (n=879)

		Y	es	N	lo
No	Problem	n	%	n	%
1	The signal is not good	400	45.5	479	54.5
2	Limited internet quota	332	37.8	547	62.2
3	Lack of concentration	804	91.5	75	8.5
4	Social relations	459	52.2	420	47.8
5	Romance problems	111	12.6	768	87.4
6	Conflict with parents	248	28.2	631	71.8
7	Finance	409	46.5	470	53.5
8	Health	322	36.6	557	63.4
9	Adequacy of food	80	9.1	799	90.9
10	Other	413	47.0	466	53.0
Ave	rage ± SD (Score)		4.07±	2.043	
Min	-Max		0-	10	

Table 3

Distribution of Respondents' Answers Regarding Social Support (n=879)

	Helpful party	Y	es	N	lo
No		n	%	n	%
1	Parent	680	77.4	199	22.6
2	Friend	744	84.6	135	15.4
3	Boyfriend or	179	20.4	700	79.6
	girlfriend				
4	Lecturer	386	43.9	493	56.1
5	Neighbor	85	9.7	794	90.3
6	Professionals	98	11.1	781	88.9
Ave	rage ± SD (Score)		2.47±	1.237	
Min	-Max		0	-6	

The data in table 2 also shows that 63.4%, 90.9%, 71.8%, and 62.2% did not experience health, food adequacy, conflicts with parents, and distance learning difficulties due to the limited internet quota.

Student Social Support

Social support is the party that helps students to deal with the problems felt after one year of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. From table 3, 84.6% and 77.4% of students stated that their friends and parents were the ones who helped them in dealing with problems. Meanwhile, 43.9% reported that the lecturer was the one who assisted in dealing with problems. On the other hand, 90.3% stated neighbors, while 88.9% stated professional staff such as doctors, psychologists, and counselors. The girlfriends of about 79.6% were not part of those who assisted in dealing with perceived problems. Therefore, a girlfriend or boyfriend is seen as an unhelpful party and can be understood in two senses. The subject has a boyfriend or girlfriend but is not seen as a helpful party or does not have one.

Coping Strategies of Students

The research on coping strategies in table 4 shows that 73.5% of students pray to God very often and believe in prayer. Furthermore, 58.6% face problems by implementing strategies to strengthen themselves and remain grateful. About 56.0 stated that they could overcome their problems, while 51.2% were able to sleep or rest.

Table 4

Distribution of Respondents' Answers Regarding Student Coping Strategies (n=879)

	ni Coping Strategies (Answ	er (%)	
No	Statement	0	1	2	3
1	Explaining problems to others	6.4	49.1	32.5	11.9
2	Determined to be able to solve problems on their own	.9	10.2	44.8	56.0
3	Pray to God	.7	4.8	21.0	73.5
4	Watching TV, listening to the radio, or reading the newspaper	18.8	38.3	28.4	14.4
5	Be strong and be grateful	.7	5.0	35.7	58.6
6	Build a relationship	.7	21.4	44.9	33.0
7	Do not cry or vent	15.7	46.1	23.9	14.3
8	Sleep or rest	1.5	10.7	36.6	51.2
9	Do the best you can	.3	9.8	52.4	37.4
10	Doing a hobby	1.1	24.5	39.6	34.8
11	Engage in social and organizational activities	9.7	26.5	29.2	34.6
12	Participate in online seminars	3.5	32.3	38.8	25.4
13	Refrain from getting angry	.7	14.7	51.0	33.7
Aver	rage ± SD (Score)		26.5±	4.373	
Min-	Max		12-	-38	

Table 5Distribution of Respondents' Answers RegardingStudent Coping Strategies (n=879)

			Answ	er (%)	
No	Statement	0	1	2	3
1	Disappointed with	10.1	65.2	20.7	4.0
	pretty trivial things				
2	Easily to get	6.6	50.2	35.5	7.7
	annoyed				
3	Easily offended	19.0	56.2	19.9	4.9
4	Too much in	20.1	49.6	23.0	7.3
	response to				
	something				
5	It's hard to	16.5	44.3	26.5	12.7
	relax/relax				
6	Hard to rest	20.9	34.7	28.6	15.8
7	Hard to calm down	9.6	40.2	33.6	16.7
8	Feeling tired from	15.8	41.0	28.4	14.8
	being too anxious				
9	Feeling impatient	30.7	46.9	16.7	5.7
10	Feeling that I am	23.3	49.1	18.9	8.6
	annoying				
11	Difficult to tolerate	20.8	50.4	24.1	4.7
	distraction				
12	Intolerant	34.2	47.6	13.9	4.3
13	Feeling in a state of	30.1	50.9	13.9	5.1
	tension				
14	Easily restless	17.2	49.0	21.6	12.2
Ave	rage \pm SD (Score)		16.99	±7.238	
Min	-Max		0-	42	

Student Stress Level

The results in table 5 show that 16.7% often find it difficult to calm down, 15.8% have difficulty resting, and 14.8% very strongly feel tired because they are too anxious. Research also shows that 35.5% of students feel strongly or often irritated, and 33.6% find it difficult to calm down after experiencing a disturbing event. Furthermore, 28.6% felt strongly or had difficulty resting quite often, 28.4% felt tired because of being too anxious (28.4%), and 26.5% found it difficult to relax.

Based on Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), stress has five levels, consisting of normal, mild, moderate, severe, and severe. The results in Table 6 show that 36.7% of female and almost half of the male students fall into normal stress levels. Meanwhile, more than a fifth of males and females are in the moderate category. Even though small, these results indicate that there are still students with severe and very severe stress levels.

Table 6	
Student Stress Level (n=879)	

	Fen	Female		Male	
	(n=	(n=692)		=187)	
Level	n	%	Ν	%	
Normal (0-14)	254	36.7	92	49.2	
Mild (15-18)	156	22.5	40	21.4	
Moderate (19-25)	181	26.2	43	23.0	
Severe (26-33)	88	12.7	8	4.3	
Very severe (>34)	13	1.9	4	2.1	

Table	7

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Stress Level			
variable	В	В	Sig.	
(Constants)			.003	
Student age (years)	574	030	.352	
Last GPA	.733	.013	.677	
Gender (0=male;				
1=female)	7.281	.173	.000**	
Pocket money/month				
(rupiah)	-2.710E-7	013	.679	
Father's age (years)	.237	.078	.090	
Mother's age (years)	174	052	.263	
Father's education				
(0:12 years; 1:>12				
years)	1.019	.030	.435	
Mother's education				
(0:12 years, 1:>12				
years)	3.344	.096	.013*	
Problem	.240	.284	.000**	
Social support	068	082	.013*	
Coping strategies	233	151	.000**	
\mathbb{R}^2		.158		
Adj R ²		.147		
F		14.788		
Sig		.000		

Effect of Characteristics, Problems, Social Support, and Coping Strategies on Stress Levels

Multiple linear regression analysis begins with a classical assumption test consisting of a normality test (Sig. .200), a heteroscedasticity test with a range of Sig values 2 tailed (.824 - .871), where the value is more than .05, multicollinearity test with VIF value (1.037 - 2.206), and autocorrelation test (DW= 2.020). The results show that the data fulfills the requirements of multiple linear regression testing.

The regression test shows the Adjusted R Square value of .147, which means that 14.7% of the stress level is influenced by student characteristics (age, GPA, gender, monthly allowance, father-mother age, and fathermother education), problems, social support, and coping strategies while the rest are influenced by other variables not examined (table 7).

The multiple linear regression test showed that based on some of the student characteristics mentioned, only gender and mother's education significantly affected student stress levels. Other variables, namely problems, social support, and coping strategies, also have significant effects. The results show a significant positive effect of mothers' education and student problems on means increasing stress levels, which mothers' education and problems students face will increase stress levels. The results also show a significant negative effect of social support and coping strategies on student stress levels. Therefore, each increase in one unit of social support and coping strategies will reduce the stress felt by students (table 7). From the multiple linear regression, a significant value of F = .000means that the four independent variables simultaneously affect student stress.

Discussion

Students in this research are registered and studying at universities in Indonesia. The characteristics are mostly in the age range of 20-22, with a female predominance. Even though they still face the Covid-19 pandemic, almost all students have a GPA of more than 3.00. These results indicate that their achievement is not in bad condition. Based on family characteristics, almost all students have a father and mother in the middle adult category (41-60), with one-third only having last education of Senior the High School/Madrasah Aliyah/equivalent.

After facing the Covid-19 pandemic, half of the students had social relationships and financial problems. This result is also supported by characteristics which show that three out of five get pocket money of less than Rp. 500,000, - per month. Some are not even given pocket money and have to work parttime in between their academic activities.

Students will seek support from peers, teachers, counselors, or other family members depending on the problem and the needed assistance, such as information, advice, strategies, and a sense of comfort (Skinner et al., 2016). The results showed that five out of six students felt that their friends were the ones who helped them in dealing with problems. Previous research stated that a peer is someone whose presence makes students feel emotional support and increases skills in academic terms (Gray et al., 2019). Furthermore, stress and anxiety conditions can also be reduced due to peer assistance (Kachaturoff et al., 2020). In Indonesia, the presence of peer counselors, especially in universities, is increasingly widespread to assist in dealing with problems. In addition to peers, three out of four students choose their parents as parties who assist in facing problems. This result is in line with previous research, which states that social support, especially from family and friends, can reduce the problems felt (Amalia & Rahmatika, 2020; Defina & Rizkillah, 2021).

In addition to social support, coping strategies are also one of the variables that can reduce stress or problems felt by students (Rosino, 2016). The results showed that most students often used coping strategies by praying to God and believing in their prayers. Similarly, more than half conducted strategies by trying to strengthen themselves and be grateful every time. This result aligns with previous research that international students' most frequently used coping strategies is to pray and be grateful to all (Defina & Rizkillah, 2021). Immanuel et al. (2021) also stated that active coping and emotional management by changing positive thinking could reduce stress in dealing with difficult events. Furthermore, after one year of facing the Covid-19 pandemic, almost half of the students had high and moderate coping strategies for dealing with their problems. This shows that students have started to carry out good strategies in dealing with problems during the Covid-19 pandemic.

High coping strategies support other research, where two out of five students fall into normal stress levels. These results support the previous research, which also showed that most students experienced normal stress levels (Hasanah et al., 2020). This is because students have good coping strategies, and according to Putri et al. (2020), those with distance learning more than twelve times tend to have lower stress levels. One out of four students still falls into the category of moderate stress level, while one in ten is included in the severe level. The results showed that more than a third of students felt irritable and difficult to calm down after experiencing disturbing events. Furthermore, one out of four often finds sleeping or relaxing difficult. In line with Son et al. (2020), most students experience sleep disorders during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The effect test showed that female students were likelier to have high-stress levels. These results align with the previous research that females had higher stress levels because of difficulties in controlling emotions (Ardiyanti et al., 2017; Hastuti & Arumsari, 2015; Krisnatuti & Latifah, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). Furthermore, females more easily experience internal symptoms and are more susceptible to stress (Duffy et al., 2019).

The mother's education at more than twelve years old also affects the tendency to have higher stress levels. This is because mothers with higher education have high expectations of their children, thereby increasing stress. This is in line with Rahmawati and Latifah (2020) that high maternal education does not always form good social-emotional development in children. The effect test results also showed that the higher the social support and coping strategies of students, the lower the stress level. These results support previous research, which also show that the support given to students will reduce their pressure because social support can increase self-confidence (Muflihah & Savira, 2021; Santoso, 2020).

Previous research has also shown that a person's coping strategies can reduce stress

levels (Oktaria et al., 2015; Rosino, 2016). The limitations are related to the use of closed questionnaires hence the results cannot be detailed.

Conclusion

After facing the Covid-19 pandemic for a year, most students still find concentrating difficult, especially when attending distance lectures. They mostly stated that their friends helped them in overcoming their problems. The students used coping strategies to pray to God and believe in the prayers, the normal the category dominated stress level. Meanwhile, the factors significantly affecting stress levels were gender, mother's education, problems, social support, and students' coping strategies.

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