



## Bibliotherapy among Psychologists: Familiarity, Attitude and Use

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### Abstract

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**Introduction:** Bibliotherapy is a low-cost and safe way to treat mental health problems. Given that the success of bibliotherapy depends on the positive attitude and familiarity of those involved in this therapy method, this study aims to investigate the familiarity, attitude, and use of bibliotherapy by psychologists working in counseling centers and the barriers and limitations in using bibliotherapy.

**Methods:** In this practical research, conducted using an analytic survey method in 2020, 101 psychologists working in counseling centers in Hamadan province, Iran, were selected by the census. The survey response rate was 100 %. All data for this study were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire. Its reliability (using the indicator of Cronbach's alpha) and validity (using two indicators of CVI and CVR) were confirmed. The data were analyzed using SPSS software version 25 using frequency distribution, Mann-Whitney, Chi-square, and Kruskal-Wallis tests.

**Results:** The results showed that more than half of the participants (53.5%) were moderately familiar with the bibliotherapy, and their level of familiarity was less than average; more than half of the participants (55.4%) used moderate bibliotherapy to treat their patient's problems, and their use rate was low to medium levels. However, psychologists' attitudes toward bibliotherapy are positive and higher than average.

**Conclusion:** Despite bibliotherapy's effectiveness and psychologists' favorable view of it, awareness and utilization remain low, highlighting the need for strategies to enhance the adoption of this therapeutic approach.

## Introduction

One of the challenges facing today's societies is the people's physical and mental health, imposing harmful economic and social effects on society. In addition, high treatment costs prevent many people from accessing adequate healthcare

services. This issue has caused much attention today on how to facilitate and accelerate people's access to mental health services (1). Similarly, in the era of managed care, treatments must be cost-effective in addition to being effective (2). Hence,



using practical, low-cost, and affordable methods in treating psychological problems is essential (3). Likewise, several studies (4-6) have shown the importance of using low-cost methods in the treatment of some psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety. When medical costs and even side effects of some treatments are considered in a cost-benefit analysis, the importance of cognitive-behavioral psychological interventions such as bibliotherapy for treating mental health problems becomes clear (2). Therefore, non-in-person methods (such as telephone counseling, Internet-based psychotherapy, and bibliotherapy) are increasing (7).

Bibliotherapy is a low-cost and safe way to help treat mental health problems. Bibliotherapy is a widely used intervention that aims to help individuals with mental health problems access texts that will support them and provide insight, guidance, or reassurance (8). Bibliotherapy improves individuals' ability to understand human behavior and motivation, stimulates their interest in the world outside the self, and reduces emotional pressures (9). Bibliotherapy generally refers to the therapeutic practice of using literature to support mental health (10). It is a practical approach to treating various mental illnesses, with specific applications tailored to the disease and demographic in question, leading to a range of definitions for the method. For example, bibliotherapy is considered an effective intervention strategy in the psychological treatment of addiction (9), and bibliotherapy appears to be among the most promising ways to promote the understanding of psychoeducational content and its adaptation to children's developmental levels (11). This variety of definitions indicates the widespread use of bibliotherapy in solving various physical, mental, and personality problems. Although the use of bibliotherapy has a long history, it has been the subject of much research on mental health issues. By searching the databases, we can find that many studies have been conducted on the effect of bibliotherapy on various types of problems, such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, stress, personal growth, child-rearing, sexuality, social skills, and the like. Although the results of

several studies indicate the weak effectiveness of bibliotherapy or its lack of effect in solving some problems (12, 13), most of the studies conducted on bibliotherapy indicate the effectiveness of this treatment method.

Many studies have been conducted on the effect of bibliotherapy on depression, stress, and anxiety (1, 14-17), indicating the positive influence of bibliotherapy on helping to treat them. Tavallaei et al. showed that bibliotherapy could be applied as an efficient intervention in women with migraine to reduce mindfulness-based stress leading to reduced levels of stress, anxiety, depression, disability, and the number of days with headache (18). Some studies recommend bibliotherapy for elementary school children to increase their reading motivation and develop their personality (11, 19, 20). The results of some studies show that creative bibliotherapy can have a small to moderate positive effect on internalizing behavior, externalizing behavior, and prosocial behavior of children (21). Similarly, the results of Lewis et al.'s study (22) provided initial support for the use of bibliotherapy in treating nighttime fears in children. According to a study, bibliotherapy also has a positive effect on alcohol dependence (9). The results of this study indicated that the participants manifested a highly negative emotional response to the positive connotation of alcohol in the texts. Zhang et al. indicated that reading materials promoted older adults' optimistic attitude toward life reduced negative emotions, and improved subjective well-being (23). In organizational issues, bibliotherapy can also be used to increase the psychological capital of the employees of different organizations, in turn providing both the employees themselves and the organization with material and spiritual gains (24).

Given the positive effect of bibliotherapy and the results of many studies that show bibliotherapy can be an effective adjunct or alternative to traditional mental health treatment, it should be given more attention by therapists as a practical, low-cost, and affordable therapeutic method. What individuals or professionals should be involved in bibliotherapy? Notably, bibliotherapy is practiced by a variety



of professions. Based on Forrest's review of the bibliotherapy literature from 1993-1997, the authors fell into four main groups: psychologists (57%), librarians (20%), nurses (11%), and social workers (10%) (25). The results of this study show that psychologists and librarians have the most studies on bibliotherapy. Correspondingly, today's research demonstrates that bibliotherapy can be a powerful collaborative effort between mental health professionals and librarians, as they provide effective reading material that complements a consumer's treatment and wellness objectives (26). Librarians can play a role in this treatment by providing the prescription for books used by mental health professionals (27). Without a doubt, the process of bibliotherapy cannot only be done by librarians, and it is reasonable to assume that collaboration between librarians and primary care providers would provide the best effort on behalf of patients (28). So, bibliotherapy as a low-cost and safe method should be utilized more by psychologists and social workers (29) with the help of librarians. This requires familiarity and a positive attitude of this group of therapists towards bibliotherapy.

Given that the success of bibliotherapy depends on the positive attitude and familiarity of those involved in this therapy method, this study aims to investigate the familiarity, attitude, and use of bibliotherapy by psychologists working in counseling centers in Hamadan, Iran. Furthermore, the barriers and limitations in using bibliotherapy from the perspective of the studied psychologists are investigated.

## Methods

In this analytic survey research conducted in 2020, we intended to study the attitude, familiarity, and use of bibliotherapy by psychologists working

in counseling centers in Hamadan province, Iran. All data for this study were collected using a made questionnaire, including 25 items (6 items related to "familiarity rate," 4 items related to "attitude," 5 items related to "use," and ten items related to "barriers and restrictions"). The measurement scale in the questionnaire was based on a five-point Likert scale. In order to evaluate the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to ten experts, and their opinions were applied to the items. In addition to face validity, content validity was also examined using two indicators of CVI and CVR. After calculating the CVI and CVR, two items were discarded, and the others with  $CVI > 0.79$  and  $CVR > 0.42$  were confirmed.

Cronbach's alpha, considered a measure of scale reliability, was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. For this purpose, after distributing the questionnaire among 30 people as a pilot, alpha coefficients of 0.787 (for "familiarity" questions), 0.879 (for "attitude" questions), 0.838 (for "use" questions), and 0.838 (for "barriers and restrictions" questions) were obtained, indicating the confirmation of the questionnaire's reliability.

The statistical population consists of all psychologists employed in counseling centers in Hamadan province, Iran, 101 people, and all psychologists were selected to be surveyed. One hundred-one questionnaires were distributed, and the survey response rate was 100%. Therefore, the data from 101 questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS, and the following results were obtained.

## Results

Table 1 indicates the respondents' demographic features by age, academic degrees, and gender. As you see, most respondents (58.4%) were female, most respondents (48.5%) had master's degrees, and most respondents (38.61%) were over 40 years old.



**Table 1.** Demographic features of the respondents

Respondent demographic features	Frequency	Percent	
<b>age</b>	25-30	7	6.93
	30-35	24	23.76
	35-40	31	30.7
	>40	39	38.61
<b>Gender</b>	male	42	41.6
	Female	59	58.4
<b>Academic degrees</b>	Bachelor	32	31.7
	Master	49	48.5
	PhD	20	19.8
<b>Total</b>	110	100	

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of respondents' answers to the questions of three dimensions: "familiarity," "use," and "attitude".

**Table 2.** Frequency distribution of respondents' answers to the questions

Variables	Questions	Frequency distribution of answers					Total
		Very low	low	Medium	High	Very high	
		Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
<b>Familiarity</b>	How familiar are you with bibliotherapy?	0 (0)	6 (5.9)	54 (53.5)	31 (30.7)	10 (9.9)	101 (100)
	Have you taken a course in bibliotherapy?	32 (31.7)	30 (29.7)	17 (16.8)	13 (12.9)	9 (8.9)	101 (100)
	Do you read articles and research related to bibliotherapy?	14 (13.9)	29 (28.7)	36 (35.6)	18 (17.8)	4 (4)	101 (100)
	How familiar are you with the process of using bibliotherapy to treat patients?	5 (5)	13 (12.9)	62 (61.4)	11 (10.9)	10 (9.9)	101 (100)
	Do you know any books related to bibliotherapy?	1 (1)	19 (18.8)	33 (32.7)	35 (34.7)	13 (12.9)	101 (100)
	Do you collect books related to different fields of treatment in the office?	10 (9.9)	23 (22.8)	32 (31.7)	28 (27.7)	8 (7.9)	101 (100)

**Table 2.** Frequency distribution of respondents' ... (continued)

Variables	Questions	Frequency distribution of answers					Total
		Very low	low	Medium	High	Very high	
		Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	
Use	How much do you use bibliotherapy for treatment?	5 (5)	20 (19.8)	56 (55.4)	18 (17.8)	2 (2)	101 (100)
	How much do you use bibliotherapy to treat depression?	5 (5)	36 (35.6)	46 (45.5)	12 (11.9)	2 (2)	101 (100)
	How much do you use bibliotherapy to treat aggression, stress, and anxiety?	7 (6.9)	37 (36.6)	31 (30.7)	22 (21.8)	4 (4)	101 (100)
	How much do you use bibliotherapy to treat the problems of children and parents	1 (1)	22 (21.8)	43 (42.6)	26 (25.7)	9 (8.9)	101 (100)
	How much do you use bibliotherapy to increase self-confidence and social skills?	4 (4)	16 (15.8)	35 (34.7)	39 (38.6)	7 (6.9)	101 (100)
Variables	Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
		Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Attitude	Bibliotherapy can be used alongside other therapies to treat mental health problems	0 (0)	1 (1)	13 (12.9)	66 (65.3)	21 (20.8)	101 (100)
	Bibliotherapy is an appropriate method that can be used at the beginning of the treatment process	0 (0)	12 (12.9)	33 (32.7)	40 (39.6)	16 (15.8)	101 (100)
	I strongly believe in the effect of bibliotherapy on mental health problems	0 (0)	19 (18.8)	32 (32.7)	36 (35.6)	13 (12.9)	101 (100)
	The effects of bibliotherapy on depression, anxiety, and aggression are still lasting after a few months	0 (0)	19 (18.8)	37 (36.6)	39 (38.6)	6 (5.9)	101 (100)

Table 3 shows the level of "familiarity," "us," and "attitude" of psychologists. In order to obtain an overall score for the attitude, familiarity, and use of psychologists concerning bibliotherapy, the scores of variables were added together separately, and an overall score was calculated. Given the five-choice scale in each question, the score range is from 1 to 5. As you can see in Table 3, considering the mean

scores and range of change, we can say that the "attitude" of psychologists towards bibliotherapy (with a mean score of 14.40 and range of changes of 4-20) is higher than average but the variables of "familiarity" (with mean score of 14.60 and range of changes of 6-30), and the "use" (with mean score of 14.90 and range of changes of 5-25) are less than average.

**Table 3.** Scores of "familiarity," "use," and "attitude" of psychologists

Variables	N	Number of questions	Minimum score	Maximum score	Variation range (average)	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Familiarity</b>	110	6	7	25	6-30 (18)	14.60	3.82
<b>Use</b>	110	5	6	23	5-25 (15)	14.9	3.5
<b>Attitude</b>	110	4	9	20	4-20 (12)	14.40	2.86

In order to select the appropriate statistical test to compare the attitudes and familiarity of the two groups of males and females, the normality of data distribution was first assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results of this test (Table 4) showed that data distribution among women was not expected ( $p < 0.05$ ), so Mann-Whitney nonparametric tests were used to analyze the data. As you can see in Table 4, according to the significance level obtained from the Mann-Whitney test ( $p=0.356 > 0.05$ ), there is no significant difference between men and women regarding familiarity with bibliotherapy. However, according to the significance level obtained from the Mann-Whitney test for "attitude" ( $p=0.019 < 0.05$ ), there is a significant difference between the "attitude" of

men and women towards bibliotherapy. Considering their mean scores, women have a better attitude towards bibliotherapy than men.

In order to compare the "use" rate in two groups of men and women, we first divided the "use" into two categories: "very low to medium" and "high to very high." then, using the chi-square test, the frequency of "use" rate in the two groups was tested. As you can see in Table 4, the "use" rate of bibliotherapy by most of the women (72.9%) and men (90.5%) is low to medium levels. The result of the chi-square test indicates a significant difference between men and women in terms of the use of bibliotherapy in the treatment of patients ( $p=0.029 < 0.05$ ), and considering the frequency of the "use" rate, women psychologists use bibliotherapy more than men.

**Table 4.** Results of comparing the level of familiarity and attitude between gender groups

Variables	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov value	P-value	Mean	Std. deviation	Mann-Whitney value	P-value
<b>Familiarity</b>	Female	0.23	0.001	15.20	4.25	-0.92	0.356
	male	0.13	0.076	13.76	2.95		
<b>Attitude</b>	Female	0.16	0.001	15	2.97	-2.35	0.019
	male	0.13	0.094	13.55	2.48		
	Gender	Very low to medium frequency (%)		High and very high frequency (%)		Total frequency (%)	Chi-square value
<b>Use</b>	Female	43 (72.9)		16 (27.1)		59 (100)	$\chi^2 = 4.78$ df = 1 p = 0.029
	male	38 (90.5)		4 (9.5)		42 (100)	

In order to select the appropriate statistical test to compare the attitudes and familiarity among "academic degrees" groups, the normality of data distribution was first assessed using the Kolmogorov– Smirnov test. The results of this test (Table 5) showed that data distribution among some "academic degrees" groups was not normal ( $p < 0.05$ ), so the Kruskal-Wallis statistics nonparametric test was used to analyze the data. As you can see in Table 5, according to the significance level obtained from the Kruskal-Wallis statistics test ( $p=0.003 < 0.05$ ), there is a significant difference among "academic degrees" groups in terms of familiarity with bibliotherapy, and considering the mean scores of them, it can be said that psychologists with Master and Ph.D. degree are more familiar with bibliotherapy. However, according to the significance level obtained from the Kruskal-Wallis

statistics test for "attitude" ( $p=0.145>0.05$ ), there is not a significant difference between the "attitude" of "academic degrees" groups towards bibliotherapy.

In order to compare the "use" rate among "academic degrees" groups, we first divided the "use" into two categories: "very low to medium" and "high to very high" and then using the chi-square test, the frequency of "use" rate in the two groups of "Bachelor" and "Master and Ph.D." was tested. As you can see in Table 5, the "use" rate of bibliotherapy by most psychologists with a bachelor's degree (90.6%) and Psychologists with a Master's and Ph.D. degree (75.4%) is low to medium levels. The result of the chi-square test showed that there is not a significant difference among "academic degrees" groups in terms of the use of bibliotherapy in the treatment of patients ( $p=0.073 > 0.05$ ).

**Table 5.** Results of comparing the familiarity rate, attitude, and the rate of use of bibliotherapy in terms of academic degree

Variables	Academic degrees	Kolmogorov-smirnov test statistics	P-value	Mean	Std. deviation	Kruskal-wallis statistics	P-value
<b>Familiarity</b>	Bachelor	0.19	0.005	13.15	2.84	11.91	0.003
	Master	0.20	0.001	15.14	4.54		
	PhD	0.29	0.001	15.60	2.45		
<b>Attitude</b>	Bachelor	0.14	0.090	14.43	2.44	3.86	0.145
	Master	0.16	0.002	14.08	2.15		
	PhD	0.24	0.003	15.30	2.59		
		Very low to medium frequency (%)			High and very high frequency (%)	Total frequency (%)	Chi-square value
<b>Use</b>	Bachelor	29 (90.6)			3 (9.4)	32 (100)	$\chi^2 = 3.20$ df = 1 p = 0.073
	Master and PhD	52 (75.4)			17 (24.6)	69 (100)	

A questionnaire asked ten questions about the barriers and limitations of using bibliotherapy. Each question had five choices: "Strongly disagree," "disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and "Strongly disagree," which had scores of 1 to 5, respectively. Then, the mean score was calculated, as shown in Table 6. As you can see in Table 6, according to the participants, the item "bibliotherapy does not work

in the treatment of acute illness," with a mean score of 4.02, is the most critical barrier to implementing bibliotherapy. Then, the items "there are no standards for bibliotherapy techniques" (mean score = 3.92) and "the habit of reading is not common in society and people are not familiar with the correct way of reading" (mean score = 3.78) are in the following ranks, respectively.



**Table 6.** Prioritize barriers to the use of bibliotherapy in treatment

Priority	Item	Mean score
1	Bibliotherapy does not work in the treatment of acute illness	4.02
2	There are no standards for bibliotherapy techniques	3.92
3	The habit of reading is not common in society, and people are not familiar with the correct way of reading	3.78
4	Mutual cooperation between trained and skilled librarians and psychologists in bibliotherapy is not appropriate	3.62
5	There are no training courses for bibliotherapy	3.58
6	Some patients refuse to continue reading the book	3.42
7	Lack of fluent and simple books for the public about psychological problems	3.36
8	The book is not suitable for the age of the clients	3.29
9	Lack of books that can cover all areas of treatment	3.26
10	Client illiteracy	3.16

## Discussion

In recent years, non-in-person methods (such as telephone counseling, Internet-based psychotherapy, and bibliotherapy) have been increasing (7). Bibliotherapy, as a low-cost and safe way to help treat mental health problems, should be utilized more by psychologists and social workers (29) and with the help of librarians. The process of bibliotherapy as a complement to the treatment of various diseases, especially mental problems, is a three-dimensional process in which one side is the patient and two other sides are librarians and psychologists. Librarians, along with psychologists, can significantly assist in using this low-risk, low-cost method to help treat mental health problems. Nevertheless, the success of bibliotherapy depends on the positive attitude and familiarity of those involved in this therapy method and efforts to remove barriers to bibliotherapy. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the attitude, familiarity, and use of bibliotherapy by psychologists working in counseling centers as the main factors in the bibliotherapy process. Also, the barriers and limitations of using bibliotherapy from the psychologists' perspective were investigated.

According to the results of the study, more than half of the participants (53.5%) were moderately

familiar with bibliotherapy, and most of them stated that the amount of reading resources related to bibliotherapy is moderate, and the rate of passing a workshop or course on bibliotherapy was very low. This dilemma can make psychologists less familiar with bibliotherapy. Few psychiatrists and counselors currently use this method, relying solely on personal experience (30). In general, the mean score of "familiarity" of psychologists with bibliotherapy was 14.60, which, according to the range of changes of scores (6-30), it can be concluded that their level of familiarity is less than average, and this result was not significantly different between male and female groups. These results are consistent with the results of Tajdaran et al. in 2014, who studied self-help treatment through books. They found that 52% of psychologists and counselors were moderately familiar with the method of self-help treatment with books (31). Also, the results showed that psychologists with Master's and PhD degrees are more familiar with bibliotherapy than a bachelor. Therefore, the higher the level of education, the more likely they are to become familiar with different treatment methods, such as bibliotherapy, due to their higher scientific education.

According to the results of the study, more than



half of the participants (55.4%) used moderate bibliotherapy to treat their patient's problems, and in general, the mean score of "use" of bibliotherapy by psychologists was 14.9, which, according to the range of changes of scores (5-25), it can be concluded that their use rate is low to medium levels. Despite the results of various studies on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in solving many mental problems (1, 14-16, 18-22), these results indicate the low attention of psychologists as the most important group involved in treating mental problems to do bibliotherapy. Likewise, according to findings, women use bibliotherapy a little more than men in treating patients, but there is no difference among "academic degree" groups in bibliotherapy. Although Forrest (25) showed that 57% of psychologists, 20% of librarians, 11% of nurses (11%), and 10% of social workers use bibliotherapy, and psychologists are the first group to use bibliotherapy. Their role in this process is very critical, but the result of this research, like the research of Tajdaran et al. (31), showed that psychologists use bibliotherapy to a lesser extent.

Regarding the participants' attitudes, the situation was relatively better, and the participants had a good attitude towards bibliotherapy despite their lack of familiarity and low use of bibliotherapy. The results showed that most of the participants (86.1%) agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that "Bibliotherapy can be used alongside other therapies to treat mental health problems," and in general, the mean score of "attitudes" of psychologists toward bibliotherapy was 14.40, which according to the range of changes of scores (4-20), it can be concluded that attitude of psychologists toward bibliotherapy is positive and higher than average. This attitude was the same among "academic degrees" groups but was slightly more positive among women psychologists. Probably because of this, female psychologists used bibliotherapy more than men. This result is consistent with Landreville et al. They found that bibliotherapy and psychotherapy were both rated as more acceptable than antidepressants for treating mild to moderate levels of depression (32). The results of this study indicated a low level of familiarity and use of bibliotherapy by psychologists, but their attitude towards this complementary therapy was

very positive.

Finally, psychologists were asked to prioritize ten barriers and limitations for bibliotherapy to determine their views on these barriers. Results showed that "disbelief in the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in acute illness," with the highest mean (4.02), is the most critical barrier to bibliotherapy. This result is similar to the result of Quigley, who found in their research that the respondents considered bibliotherapy insufficient to deal with their problem (33). This may be because psychologists have yet to consider bibliotherapy a treatment supplement. Lack of standards for bibliotherapy, lack of reading culture and reading habits, lack of cooperation and proper communication between librarians and psychologists, and lack of training courses for bibliotherapy are other essential barriers and limitations in using bibliotherapy.

## Conclusion

The study discovered that despite bibliotherapy's importance, positive impact, and capabilities, the level of familiarity of examined counselors and psychologists with bibliotherapy is low. Nevertheless, fortunately, their attitude toward bibliotherapy is positive. Considering the positive effects of bibliotherapy that have been confirmed in various studies, this study reveals the necessity of teaching it to familiarize psychologists and librarians with this effective treatment method. Hence, given the barriers and limitations mentioned for bibliotherapy, it is necessary:

1. To make a lot of policy and efforts to develop the habit of reading in society.
2. To hold bibliotherapy courses for psychologists and librarians.
3. To include bibliotherapy as a course in psychology and librarianship.
4. To strengthen the cooperation between psychologists and librarians by holding annual bibliotherapy congresses. Bibliotherapy involves collaboration between psychologists and librarians.

## Limitations

This research was conducted on a small sample, including psychologists working in counseling



centers in Hamadan, Iran. In order to expand the study, psychiatrists and librarians in different areas can be examined in future research.

## Declaration

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### Conflicts of Interests

The researcher had no conflict of interest in this

article

### Ethical Statement

The study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Hamadan University of Medical Sciences (Ethics code is IR.UMSHA.REC.1397.394). Also, the discretion of the responses from participants was maintained. The data obtained from the questionnaire were used for the intended purposes and without any intervention or partiality.

### Authors' contributions

All the authors contributed to the preparation of the final manuscript. A.M.R. has contributed the most in guiding the master's thesis and preparing this article.

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