

The Effect of Optimism and Gratitude on Subjective Well-Being of Parents of Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

The children who are born with imperfect conditions are often referred to as children with special needs. Parents of children with special needs have been shown to have low levels of optimism and gratitude, which can affect the level of subjective well-being. This research aims to prove the influence of optimism and gratitude on the subjective well-being of parents with special needs children. The present study used a quantitative approach with a survey research type. The research location was in Pidie Regency, Aceh, with a sample size of 132 parents aged 20-55. The sampling technique used was simple random sampling. The instruments used in this research include The Satisfaction of Life Scale (SWLS) and Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) with a reliability value of 0.710, the Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) with a reliability value of 0.793, and the Gratitude Questionnaire (Q-6) with a reliability value of 0.761. The results show that optimism and gratitude can simultaneously influence the subjective well-being of parents who have children with special needs ($\beta=0.087$, $p=0.000$). The practical contribution made by optimism and gratitude to subjective well-being is 97.5%. The study revealed that optimism and gratitude are very influential in increasing the subjective well-being of parents. In conclusion, parents with high subjective well-being tend to show confidence, appreciation, and satisfaction in life, thus positively contributing to parental involvement with children.

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INTRODUCTION

The term subjective well-being can be used to describe the state of health of a person who considers his life to be going well (Stenlund et al., 2021; Diener et al., 2018). It can also describe the health status of a person who is disease-free (Begeer et al., 2017). Subjective well-being is seen differently by each individual. Individuals who own a significant amount of wealth may experience a sense of satisfaction in their subjective well-being. On the other hand, others believe that subjective well-being arises when their social and psychological needs are met (Negeri, 2013). As stated by Seligman (2002), everyone can achieve subjective well-being. According to Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003), life satisfaction is a person's emotional and cognitive evaluation of their life in the present and future. Life satisfaction and its positive and negative effects are aspects of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2003).

Researchers are interested in studying parents' subjective well-being of children with special needs. Every parent want to have children, and a significant number of them perceive their family as lacking if they are unable to conceive children. According to Herbst (2012), people believe that having children is a good thing for the family because it can increase well-being, happiness, and harmony. According to research by Kahneman and Krueger (2006), family circumstances determine parents' subjective well-being, especially mothers (Diana et al., 2023). Contented parents will experience improved well-being when their family circumstances are favorable, such as having a perfect child without any imperfections.

Congenital disabilities are conditions when children are born with physical or mental restrictions from the early stages of their development. Certain families have children who possess conditions that deviate from those of typical children, such as blindness, deafness, physical disabilities, speech impairments, cognitive impairments, and hearing impairments, among others. The term "special needs child" describes this situation. According to Suran and Misso (1979) (in Mangunsong, 2009), children with special needs are interpreted very differently from other children in essential aspects of their humanitarian role. Their social, cognitive, physical, and psychological condition prevents them from fully achieving their needs, potential, or goals.

In 2022, the Aceh Statistics Agency recorded a total of 18,442 individuals with special needs throughout 23 districts. As a result, the percentage of children with special needs also varied. In West Aceh Regency, there were 624 individuals (3%) recorded. Southwest Aceh Regency had 876 individuals (5%), Aceh Besar Regency had 1313 individuals (7%), Aceh Jaya Regency had 700 individuals (4%), South Aceh Regency had 1542 individuals (8%), Aceh Singkil Regency had 469 individuals (3%), Aceh Tamiang Regency had 857 individuals (5%), Central Aceh Regency had 638 individuals (3%), Southeast Aceh Regency had 310 individuals (2%), East Aceh Regency had 1022 individuals (6%), North Aceh Regency had 2291 individuals (12%), Bener Meriah Regency had 499 individuals (3%), Bireuen

Regency had 1365 individuals (7%), Gayo Lues Regency had 355 individuals (2%), Nagan Raya Regency had 954 individuals (5%), Pidie Jaya Regency had 643 individuals (3%), Simeuleu Regency had 437 individuals (2%), Banda Aceh City had 646 individuals (4%), Langsa City had 678 individuals (4%), Lhokseumawe City had 356 individuals (2%), Sabang City had 539 individuals (3%), and Subulussalam City had 1124 individuals (6%).

All parents want their children to be born perfectly, physically, and spiritually healthy. Parents will have a different level of happiness if they observe each child's development and relish every opportunity to see it because people with high subjective well-being can control emotions and deal with various experiences and events (Lestari, 2019). Parents need to carry out various duties as parents, especially parents of children who have special needs. In addition, it is based on the idea that having a high level of subjective well-being makes it possible to obtain a positive view of the psychological. Being able to solve live problems is a sign of satisfaction and happiness (Rakhman et al., 2018). Parents who do not have a good level of subjective well-being are considered unable to carry out their responsibilities, feel unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives, and will judge their children who have special needs in a negative way (Rahmadani, 2013).

Subjective well-being can produce satisfaction, joy, and a lack of sadness or anger (Diener et al., 1997). The research is reinforced by Diansari (2016), who states that subjective well-being is a person's understanding of how they live their life, characterized by high life satisfaction and positive emotions compared to negative emotions. A previous study by Faisal and Hermina (2019) found that parents who have children with special needs have a high level of happiness as parents have a good relationship with the child's environment, participate in educating children, and find positive meaning in life. However, Perdana and Dewi (2015) demonstrate that parental pleasure in the context of children with special needs arises when parents are able to embrace the child's circumstances and actively engage in their care and upbringing. Consequently, the mother prioritizes the child above anything else in her life.

However, some parents who have children with special needs do not yet feel the ideal level of subjective well-being. Research conducted by Na'imah, Nur'aeni, and Septiningsih (2017) found that some of the negative feelings of the parents when they find out that their child has an imperfect condition include fear, guilt, and caring about negative stigma from the environment. Parents who have children with special needs show some negative feelings, such as depression, sadness, and anger, because they are unable to accept their child's circumstances and because they are worried about their child's future. Those negative feelings and thoughts suggest that some parents may not yet feel subjective well-being, as it can trigger adverse feelings in life (Furnham & Fudge, 2008). When parents learn that their child has special needs, their typical first response is sadness,

rejection, exhaustion, guilt, and overthink about how they deal with their children with special needs (Hodgetts et al., 2024).

Parents of children with special needs in previous studies reported having significant difficulty staying close to their children. The parents also report more often that their children experience frequent exclusion by the public (Miller et al., 2021). Lestari and Pratisti (2019) found that some parents who have children with special needs experience pressure, stress, and lower well-being. All the difficulties faced by parents include knowing that their child is diagnosed as a child with special needs and having to take specific measures to maintain it. Therefore, parents who have children with special needs are introduced to positive thinking (Hidayat et al., 2023; Suud & Na'imah, 2023).

Several issues have been mentioned, but optimism and gratitude are two factors that influence the subjective well-being of parents who have children with special needs (Compton, 2005). Optimism is another positive trait parents should have for children with special needs (Ekas et al., 2010). Optimism can influence how parents see their children (Nelson & McIntyre, 2017). Parents who are unwilling to accept their child under any circumstances sometimes choose to ignore them. However, it is crucial for children to have their parents' support, particularly from parents who comprehend the situation, in order to foster their personal growth and resilience. According to research conducted by Rand et al. (2020), optimism is one component that can affect a person's subjective well-being. Optimism can greatly mitigate the adverse effects of life. Therefore, parents who have children with special needs should possess a strong sense of optimism in order to effectively fulfill their parental duties.

According to Carver and Scheier (1994), optimism is a mindset characterized by a strong inclination towards positive outcomes and a will to attain them. Positive influence will also be exerted by individuals who are optimistic. Lopez et al. (2019) described optimism as a person's belief in their future that will positively impact them and protect them from negative emotions. Meanwhile, Carver and Scheier (1998) found that optimism has goals and expectations. In addition, previous research has shown that optimism can affect a person's subjective well-being. Research conducted by Sabiq and Miftahuddin (2017) showed that the optimism variable had a significant favorable influence on the nurse's health, with a regression coefficient of 0.185 and a significance of 0.007 ($\text{sig} < 0.05$). From a positive perspective, nurses' higher optimism relates to their subjective well-being.

According to Snyder and Lopez (2002), gratitude can be defined as a condition that a person experiences that includes all events or experiences they experience in everyday life. Gratitude has positive points for individual subjective well-being and can also provide many benefits, such as feeling calm, having a good and pleasant relationship, or feeling a better life (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2002). Gratitude can also improve physical and psychological health, pro-sociality, religiosity, optimism, and enthusiasm. Gratitude is one of

the crucial factors that can encourage positive changes in a person and their family (Bono et al., 2004). According to Mccullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002), gratitude is a general tendency to always be aware of and respond to the good deeds of others and be grateful for any positive events. Joseph (2015) also explains that gratitude is the feeling a person experiences when they receive gifts or benefits from others (Hizbullah & Mulyati, 2022). Mccullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) mention four aspects of gratitude: intensity, frequency, span, and density.

In several examples, parents with special needs children consider that their children are a sign of God's love and blessing. Consequently, they feel compelled to provide diligent and attentive care for their child without harboring any sense of misfortune. Grateful parents will also receive everything they have without feelings of inadequacy. The results of research conducted by Panggagas, Imawati, and Sari in 2019 showed that gratitude as an additional component also affects a person's subjective well-being. The correlation coefficient number shows that gratitude significantly influences a person's subjective well-being.

Previous studies have shown that parents of children with special needs are strongly influenced by their level of subjective well-being. Various challenges and obstacles arise when embarking on the journey of parenthood. Parents who thrive are also capable of fulfilling their responsibilities effectively; they do not view their children as a source of regret or luck. Therefore, parents need optimism and gratitude to increase their subjective well-being. Parents' confidence and gratitude can make them feel better about carrying out their responsibilities as parents to their children. In addition, the hypothesis in this study is whether there is an influence between optimism and gratitude on the subjective well-being of parents who have children with special needs. This research also aims to show that optimism and gratitude can simultaneously affect the subjective well-being of parents with special needs children.

METHODS

Research Approach

The approach used in this research is a quantitative approach, with the type of research being a survey. Survey research is defined as research conducted on small or large populations using a measuring tool, a questionnaire (Sugiyono, 2018). The approach will also test a theory by detailing a specific hypothesis and then collecting data to support or refute the hypothesis.

Location and Subject

The study was conducted in Pidie Regency, Aceh Province. The study population comprised 204 parents, while the sample is 132 parents aged between 20 and 55. The researcher employed a simple random sampling technique, selecting the sample size based on Krejcie and Morgan tables. Subsequently, a random study sample was chosen from the population data to fulfill the required quantity.

Instruments

Data collection is carried out using questionnaires distributed through Google Forms. According to Riduwan (2018), a questionnaire is a measuring tool consisting of statements given to research samples to obtain complete information about the problems faced by respondents. The research scale used includes The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) adapted from Kastanya and Cuangganatha (2022) with a reliability value of 0.929, Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) that adapted from Faradilla (2021) with a reliability value of 0.798, and the Gratitude Questionnaire (Q-6) that adapted from Aulia et al. (2022) with a reliability value of 0.807. Testing was carried out with the help of three psychology experts. The variables (optimism, gratitude, and subjective well-being) received a V-Aiken score of 1, indicating high validity. In the journal adaptation process to obtain the three scales, the researcher asked permission for the names mentioned by emailing the relevant authors. Subsequently, the researcher engaged in a discussion with the supervisor to facilitate the continuation of the validity testing process by the three psychological specialists. Subsequently, the researcher carried out the investigation.

Data Analysis Technique

Normality Test

The normality test aims to determine whether the dependent and independent variables in the regression model have a normal distribution (Ghozali, 2018). This research uses Kolmogorov Smirnov's statistical approaches, where the data is normally distributed if the statistical result is > 0.05 .

Multicollinearity Test

A multicollinearity test is intended to see the correlation between the variables. A good regression model should not correlate with independent variables (Ghozali, 2018). If the independent variables are correlated, then the variables are said to have less reliable statistical inferences.

Heteroscedasticity Test

The heteroscedasticity test aims to test whether there is an inequality of variance in the regression model from the residuals of one observation to another. If the variance from the residual from one observation to another is constant, it is called homoscedasticity; if it is different, it is called heteroscedasticity.

Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis test decides whether the hypothesis is accepted or rejected. The technique used to test the hypothesis in this research is multiple regression analysis using SPSS Statistic 22 software.

Multiple Regression Analysis

According to Ghozali (2018), the multiple regression analysis involves more than

one independent variable. This model determines the independent variables' direction and influence on the dependent variable.

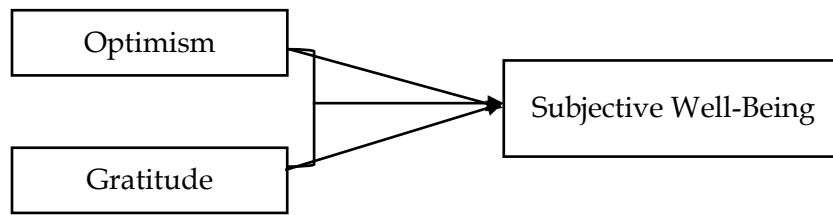


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Optimism of Parents

The optimism scores of parents with special needs children were categorized into five categories: excellent, good, sufficient, poor, and very poor. The results of optimism's categorization can be seen in Table 1. The results showed that parents were in a "good" category with a figure of 64% of the total. This finding indicates that even though some parents have a high optimism category, they still need a lot of internal and external support to enhance their optimism in a better direction. Supported by previous research, Chang et al. (2020) stated the importance of optimism in a person's efforts to foster subjective well-being. Optimism is a positive predictor of happiness because several things have increased a sense of life satisfaction and positively influenced subjective well-being. Optimism consistently improves a person's subjective well-being because optimism is a positive attitude that can help a person survive (Veeramani et al., 2015).

Table 1. Optimism Frequency Distribution of Parents

Variable	Category	Range	Total	%
Optimism	Excellent	$X \geq 29.99$	0	0%
	Good	$23.33 < X < 29.99$	85	64%
	Sufficient	$16.67 < X < 23.33$	44	33%
	Poor	$10.01 < X < 16.67$	3	2%
	Very Poor	$X \leq 10.01$	0	0%
Total			132	100%

Gratitude of Parents

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistical analysis results on the parents' gratitude. Similar to the optimism scores, the gratitude scores of parents with special needs are categorized into five categories: excellent, good, sufficient, poor, and very poor. Parents' gratitude is dominated by the medium category, with a figure of 83% of the total. Therefore, parents are stated to need other positive affirmations to maximize their sense of gratitude so that they can feel their subjective well-being. Some literature supporting this research's results states

that gratitude positively predicts a person's subjective well-being (Froh et al., 2008; Chan, 2013; Sapmaz et al., 2016). Research by Wood et al. (2010) found that there is a strong circle between gratitude and positive emotions that raises subjective well-being in a person. Individuals who cultivate feelings of gratitude towards aspects of life can help individuals not to have opposing views that trigger destructive emotions (Wolfe, 2022). Interventions are based on gratitude and aim to generate feelings of worth in one's life, even towards others. Gratitude has been proven to positively impact mental and physical well-being and health (Watkins, 2014).

Table 2. Gratitude Frequency Distribution of Parents

Variable	Category	Range	Total	%
Gratitude	Excellent	$X \geq 33$	0	0%
	Good	$27 < X < 33$	16	12%
	Sufficient	$21 < X < 27$	109	83%
	Poor	$15 < X < 21$	6	5%
	Very Poor	$X \leq 15$	1	1%
Total			132	100%

Subjective Well-Being of Parents

The subjective well-being scores were categorized into five: excellent, good, sufficient, poor, and very poor. The statistical analysis results on the parents' subjective well-being who have children with special needs can be seen in Table 3. The results of the categorization of subjective well-being variables showed that parents were in the excellent category, with a figure of 60% of the total. These findings suggest that although parents tend to be in the high category, they still feel anxious and dissatisfied and blame themselves. Therefore, parents require positive support to increase subjective well-being so they can carry out their responsibilities as parents of children with special needs. The finding is strengthened by research by Arsih and Syafiq (2022), which suggests that there are two determining factors in optimizing the subjective well-being of parents with children with special needs, namely supporting factors in the form of having good social relationships, receiving positive support, and making positive meaning of the situation they are experiencing. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include receiving bad treatment from the environment (Jannatunnisa & Qodariah, 2017) and experiencing difficulties in caring for children, especially since the children being looked after are children with particular characteristics (Paramita & Budisetyani, 2020).

Table 3. Subjective Well-Being Frequency Distribution of Parents

Variable	Category	Range	Total	%
Subjective Well-Being	Excellent	$X \geq 93.5$	0	0%
	Good	$76.5 < X < 93.5$	79	60%
	Sufficient	$59.5 < X < 76.5$	50	38%
	Poor	$42.5 < X < 59.5$	3	2%
	Very Poor	$X \leq 42.5$	0	0%
Total			132	100%

Parents' Level of Education

Research results show that most parents have completed their education at the high school level. There are parents with final education at the elementary school level at 14%, at the junior high school level at 10%, at the high school level at 36%, at D1 level at 1%, at D3 level at 3%, at D4 level at 2%, bachelor's degree level at 33%, while master's degree's level is at 2%. Different levels of education can result in different knowledge being possessed. The higher a person's level of education, the easier it is to optimize his knowledge (Notoatmodjo, 2003; Apriastuti, 2013). Parents with high knowledge also have good sensitivity to children's needs. Even though children have shortcomings, they also want development for themselves and their environment. Because basically, children with special needs experience many things that children in general do not experience (Renawati et al., 2017). Therefore, parents must know how to care for and educate children to develop well (Rahma & Indrawati, 2017).

Categories of Children with Special Needs

The research results show that parents have various categories of children with special needs. There are 23% of children who are developmentally disabled, 17% of children are deaf, 15% of children have quadriplegia, 14% of children are autistic, 11% of children are blind, 7% of children are deaf, 7% of children are hyperactive, 5% of children are speech impaired, while 2% of children have Down syndrome. The different categories of children with special needs also have much influence on parents, one of which is influencing the level of difficulty parents have in the daily care process (Ericzen et al., 2005; Alos et al., 2022). Parents have many challenges in educating and caring for the diversity of children's conditions. The challenges parents feel have a negative psychological impact (Hasanah et al., 2019; Arsih & Syafiq, 2022), as well as parents experiencing stress. Similarly, a study by Lindo et al. (2016) states several types of stress faced by parents who have children with disabilities: relationships (Freedman et al., 2012), finances (Parish et al., 2012), family (Binyamini & Ajaj, 2012), and decreased effectiveness of childcare (Karst & Hecke, 2012).

The Effect of Optimism and Gratitude on Subjective Well-Being of Parents of Children with Special Needs

The research results show that the hypothesis proposed in this research is accepted. Optimism and gratitude can influence subjective well-being in parents with special needs children. This is proven by the hypothesis test that found a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) and the regression line equation obtained $Y=11.440+1.320X_1+1.398X_2$ (Table 4), which shows that the value of subjective well-being increases with the increase in the value of optimism and gratitude. Furthermore, the effective contribution made by optimism and gratitude to subjective well-being was 97.5% (Table 5). Obtaining 97.5% was helped by the religious values that his parents instilled in him, influencing his parents' confidence and gratitude towards what he had in his life so that he could also

have a good sense of well-being because in whatever situation he faced, his parents will involve Allah SWT (Muthia, 2021).

Table 4. Coefficients of the Regression Equation

Variable	Coefficients Regression	Sign.
Constant	11.440	0.000
Gratitude	1.320	0.000
Subjective Well-Being	1.398	0.000

Table 5. Coefficients of Determination

Model	R	R Square
Regression	0,988	0.975

The various theoretical reasons that corroborate the results of this study are the research of Pasyola et al. (2021), which states that individuals who have optimism tend to have good hopes in order to achieve all the goals that have been targeted. Parents also find it challenging to feel pessimistic and assume that having a child with a privilege is not a failure in carrying out their responsibilities as parents. Megawati et al. (2019) stated that a person's subjective well-being can be improved by having good optimism. Optimism also allows a person to focus on finding solutions to the downturn experienced (Suryaningsih, 2016). Research by Katim et al. (2023) showed that optimism is one of the coping methods for releasing negative emotions. Optimism can also improve parents' subjective well-being by releasing negative emotions. Furthermore, parents of children with special needs have quite complex problems and go through many stages in their lives.

Liu et al. (2018) stated that someone with good optimism tends to feel good subjective well-being, too, so someone has the strength to face life's problems (Lestari & Fajar, 2020). The finding is also reinforced by Devitasari and Utami (2022), who state that optimism is an essential factor in forming subjective well-being so they can feel well-being, solve the problems they face, and are also able to control their emotions. In line with the research results of Gomes and Izzati (2021), high optimism can reveal the subjective well-being that one has even though a person is in a bad condition. However, apart from the optimism variable, this research also proves that gratitude is a positive predictor that influences the subjective well-being of parents of children with special needs.

Previous research (Froh et al., 2008; Wood et al., 2010; Chan, 2013; Sapmaz et al., 2016) also revealed that gratitude can predict a person's *subjective well-being*. It can be explained as the formation of a concept of gratitude to someone. This concept includes a person's recognition of favorable circumstances, the development of good responses to positive circumstances, and a feeling of freely accepting things that happen in life. Chan (2013) reinforces that a person's gratitude influences life satisfaction, increased positive emotions, and low negative emotions. Individuals with feelings of gratitude influence subjective

well-being because this is a form of positive expression and influences the creation of pleasant, positive emotions (Milenia & Pratisti, 2023). Furthermore, they also feel happy in making sense of life and appreciating what they have.

Gratitude is a positive life orientation, so by being grateful, a person has a positive view of the events experienced in his life, which makes a person not easily affected by the presence of these events, such as parents who have children who have special needs or children who have conditions that do not exist (Pramithasari & Suseno, 2019). Findings from Ramzan and Rana (2014) also say that grateful people will feel satisfied with their lives. Therefore, gratitude plays a vital role in a person's well-being because gratitude can help someone face life's problems, both mental and physical. A person will assess many things positively, making it easier for him to improve his well-being in life.

Some of the explanations above indicate that the findings of this research support previous research (Fauzi, 2013; Smith & Grzywacz, 2014; Primadata et al., 2015; Golan, 2016; Kardas et al., 2018; Robustelli & Whisman, 2018; Dewi & Nasywa, 2019; Sarwar et al., 2019; Sukmadi et al., 2020; Pasyola et al., 2021; Rikumahu & Rahayu, 2022). The research reported that optimism and gratitude are two positive predictors that can influence the subjective well-being of parents with special needs children. In addition, several research limitations include the distribution of measuring instruments, which was carried out via Google Forms, so researchers could not interact directly with the research subjects. Initially, the researchers limited the age range of children aged 13 to 15 or those studying at the junior high school level. After obtaining initial research data, the researchers found that parents with children with special needs had a range of this age that did not meet the required sample size, so researchers researched all parents with children with special needs without limiting the child's age.

CONCLUSIONS

Researchers found that subjective well-being is crucial for all parents, especially children with special needs, because they face many challenges and difficulties in life. Starting from the feeling of knowing that the child has shortcomings, various feelings arise. Then, parents also need to adapt to all children's behavior, which every day is faced with children's behavior that is not normal like children in general. The various emotions felt can influence parents' subjective well-being. Therefore, subjective well-being also helps parents better understand and accept their child's condition so that they can get to know the child better without regretting their situation. Researchers also found that optimism and gratitude are two factors that influence subjective well-being, as both can enhance subjective well-being by fostering a positive outlook, strong beliefs, and gratitude for what Allah has in life. Parents need to have high optimism and gratitude to optimize subjective well-being so that they can also carry out their duties of caring for and raising their children, even if the child has special needs.

Based on the results, it is recommended that those researching this theme develop experimental research by conducting interventions or training related to research variables so that the impact of the research can be obtained directly on the subjects. Apart from optimism and gratitude, further research can also investigate other factors influencing subjective well-being. Weaknesses were found, which can be used as suggestions for further research. The suggestion is to conduct research directly to interact with the subject with no limit in determining research subjects.

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