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Psychological Peculiarities of Internally Displaced Students' Readaptation to Study in Higher Educational Establishments in Ukraine

ABSTRACT : One method of student readaptation to study is the annual practice of Depth Psychotherapy. Depth Psychotherapy takes place in a learning environment at the Psychology Department of the Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy. The purpose of this practice is to help students overcome their internal stress, to form internal stability and to develop confidence regarding their future lives. Additionally, depth psychotherapy aims to help students develop mental health and self-help skills: introspection, the skill of autogenic training, the sublimation of mental energy into creative activities or sport and the ability to predict the risks of conflict behavior and aggressive tendencies. Students gain knowledge about self-identification and their sense of life, they also acquire the ability to react to their negative emotions, as they are able to understand the future consequences of their actions. The essence of the psychocorrection method, which is realized through the techniques of active social and psychological education, is based on the creative expression of students' own feelings and emotions. It reinforces their self-identity and improves interpersonal communication. As a result, psychocorrection practice gives rise to a constructive self-realization of individuals in a society by activating their motivation to learn and thus discover their social roles. The psychocorrection practice implemented in the course of active social and psychological education, based on the principles of trust and unprejudiced judgment, reveals individuals' capabilities of adaptation and facilitates their adaptation to the changed conditions of the social situation in Ukraine.

KEY WORDS : readaptation, method of active social and psychological education, internally displaced persons, forced migrants, military conflict, art therapy

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Introduction

In present-day Ukraine, psychologists deal with people affected by psychological traumas resulting from exposure to military operations, which have a destructive influence on human life. This problem is becoming increasingly complex and demands the activation of research. The contemporary military activities in the East and in the South of Ukraine between 2014 and 2015 are important factors contributing to psychological changes, such as anxiety, depression, bewilderment, problems with social adaptation and the decline of effective communication. Psychological trauma is stimulated in the unconscious through traumatic memories which can impede the person's ability to function in daily life, and create fear and mistrust which hinder a migrant's adaptation to life in a new reality. This concerns soldiers and their close relatives, refugees and displaced persons, adults and children – all these categories of people who endure emotional and mental hardships. Therefore, the process of readaptation of internally displaced persons in Ukraine is a primary focus of psychologists.

According to desk research conducted for the purpose of this study, in 2014 there were 1.4 thousand students who fled the occupied territories in the Crimea, and an additional 30 thousand students who fled Donbas. In 2015 there were a further 100 thousand scientists, associate university professors, school teachers and students displaced in Ukraine. It is estimated that in the years 2014–2015 there were roughly 1.3–1.4 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

The Law of Ukraine “On ensuring the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons” № 1706-VII from the 20th October 2014, provides that the citizens of Ukraine who left their permanent places of residence have a right to social protection in the independent territories of Ukraine. Internally displaced persons belong to vulnerable groups and can have specific needs, such as: the need for housing, social guarantees, legal protection, political security, protection from violence and persecution, the need for equality of social positions, etc. (Bochkor & Dubrovs'ka & Zales'ka, 2014). Moreover, internally displaced individuals need psychological support to overcome individual stress and anxiety, and level aggression. Thus, psychologists have to take into consideration all new narratives of those who are compelled to leave their places of origin due to antiterrorism operations (ATO). Their status is interpreted as: “temporarily moved individuals, internally displaced persons, settlers in a new place, forced

migrants” (Kisarchuk & Omelchenko & Lazos & Ly'tvy'nenko & Czarenko, 2015: 27).

Between 2014 and 2015, Ukrainian students were forced to leave their homes because of military operations in the South as well as the East part of our country. The majority of the internally displaced persons from Donbas moved to Kharkiv city, Dnipropetrovsk city, Zaporizhzhya city and adjacent regions. The remaining displaced persons moved to Kiev, Cherkassy and other areas. People from the Crimea migrated to Odessa city, Lviv city and Mykolayiv city. The students among the displaced were given the opportunity to continue their studies in peaceful regions of Ukraine. At the same time, certain difficulties emerged regarding university transfer: restrictions in the number of places for tuition-free education; problems with preparing documents concerning student transfer at universities in occupied territories; limited benefits for displaced students; etc. Additionally, Tyshchenko (2014) described the problem of missing documents, which prevented students from continuing their education.

Methodological assumptions of the realized research

Regardless of various economic challenges, migrants face a number of everyday problems, such as difficulties with social security benefits, search for lodging and employment, and social adaptation. The social-psychological characteristics of migrants do not sufficiently reflect all processes which they experience, however, they outline the main risk factors and the orientation of psychologists' work with migrants' readaptation (Axmedova, 2003). Readaptation is interpreted as “the process of resetting the individual into the social context and the formation of his or her compensatory social skills” (Golovin, 2007: 677). The process of readaptation of Ukrainian internally displaced persons is complicated, reflecting the unexpected tragedy in the country which led to a change in their permanent places of residence as well as lifestyle. The students who lived in eastern or southern regions of Ukraine lost their property, friends and their close ones. Others lost hope and perspectives for the future.

Psychological rehabilitation combines a set of measures aimed at restoring and correcting the disturbed functions of the psyche. Golovin (2007) separates the following principles of psychological rehabilitation: partnership, diversity

of efforts, the unity of psychosocial and biological methods of influence, and sequence. The indicated principles are based on the focused cooperation of the client and the therapist to achieve the effects of rehabilitation. Axmedova (2003) identifies the following principles of psychological rehabilitation:

The principle of orientation on personal growth and development. The critical condition of refugee students should not be seen as pathological, but as a normal reaction of individuals to abnormal circumstances of life. The crisis, upon the condition of successful resolution, is the process of personal establishment on a new level of development. Thus, readaptation work can be seen as a process of personal development.

The principle of consideration of age peculiarities. The specificity of the psychologist's work should be differentiated according to the age characteristics of children and teenagers. Therefore, psycho-physiological growth, the leading form of activity and individual's interests must be taken into consideration.

The principle of orientation towards the community. While working on the problems of children and teenagers, their social environment must be taken into account. In other words, they should be considered as parts of the situation surrounding them. Psychological therapy must be offered not only to children, but also to their parents, and even teachers. In addition, rehabilitation work should be aimed at approaching different generations, at reducing the existing distance between them, and ultimately at the integration of different generations in a united community.

The principle of multifaceted work. Any rehabilitation activity should be aimed at all levels of children's or teenagers' functioning (behavior, skills, emotions, cognitive processes, values, belief system, personal identity and self-integrity). This multifaceted and complex method of support encourages the deployment of the process of a person's full constructive changes.

The principle of prolongation and sequence of the rehabilitation process. The overcoming of a traumatic experience, the assistance in mental and physical development and personal development of children and teenagers demand long-term work (not less than a year), not one-time interventions. Taking part in rehabilitation activities during the prescribed period of one year, children and teenagers will cycle through specially selected therapeutic applications. Each successive program will deepen and enrich the learned skills, abilities and experiences adopted in the previous one.

The principle of integration with society. The rehabilitation intervention should be directed at the formation of productive members of the society. For this purpose, all measures must be aimed at the development of children's and teenager's self-esteem, dignity, and tolerance towards their environment.

The principle of unconditional positive attention. Communication with children should be based on mutual trust and respect. It is important that rehabilitation sessions create a safe situation, which encourages self-expression and the disclosure of the child. This can be achieved if the child is accepted as he or she is, without any evaluation or precondition. If the therapy is trending to the correction of destructive behavior displayed by the child, the behavior or act alone must be evaluated, not the personality or character of the child (Axmedova, 2003).

In therapy with internally displaced persons, both individual and group forms of work can be applied. Psychocorrection groups are the most important methods of psychological rehabilitation at early stages of the crisis while the psychological trauma sustained is still acute and people are still under the influence of stress factors. Usually, the most vulnerable persons with various psychological and psychosomatic problems participate in these group sessions. Group methods of psychosocial rehabilitation are aimed at:

- reacting to injuries and the inclusion of mechanisms for stress management;
- reduction of stress disorders (such as anxiety, intrusive memories, insomnia, nightmares, irritability, depression);
- correction of psychosomatic disorders;
- development of skills to overcome mental crises.

In group sessions, depending on the tasks, psychotherapists use a whole range of psychotherapeutic methods such as group storytelling with further study of trauma, relaxation techniques, Gestalt-therapy, behavior therapy, psychodrama, cognitive therapy, and psychodynamic approach. Group storytelling with further study of trauma is applied to diagnose anxiety, traumatic experience and expectations. Relaxation techniques are effective in reducing tension. Gestalt-therapy involves work with a person's current anxieties and fears. Behavior therapy is a technique for the formation of constructive behavior. Psychodrama is a method of re-playing traumatic events and negative life situations, which a psychologist helps to perceive and revalue in a group context. Cognitive therapy is very important in the recognition of a person's negative thoughts about

traumatic experiences, and their transformation into positive perceptions. The psychodynamic approach is a basic method of diagnosing emotions, thoughts, mental problems and working towards a healthy psychological state. The need for carrying out such rehabilitation work disappears when the displaced students acquire the skills of overcoming the crisis and form self-help and mutual aid groups. The internally displaced persons gradually become self-reliant and take responsibility for their own destiny, which motivates migrants to continue their studies.

The practice of art therapy is widely applied in working with internally displaced persons, which is also the case in Ukraine. As Voznesens'ka (2015) writes: "Art therapy helps immigrants to cope with depression, get rid of negative emotions, to move from destructive, devastating behavior to constructive and creative attitudes" (Voznesens'ka, 2015: 4). The author presented the following benefits of art therapy in working with internal migrants: there are no limitations to its application, it provides an opportunity for nonverbal communication, and opens the desire for self-expression and creativity.

We apply the method of active social and psychological study for the purpose of rehabilitation of displaced students, which helps develop their self-awareness. The application of the method of Active Social and Psychological Education (ASPE) is part of the educational process employed by the psychological faculty at the Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy. Internally displaced students of other courses of study can also receive psychological help thanks to the work of the psychological services of this University. The provision of psychological assistance to displaced students helps to restore balance to their internal state and harmonize their psyche. The process of adaptation to studying at a higher education institution is becoming more effective thanks to the restoration of students' psychological health. This enables the students to focus to a greater extent on the learning process and to avoid re-experiencing traumatic events.

The method of Active Social and Psychological Education (ASPE), developed in 1978 by professor Tamara S. Yatsenko, a Member of the Academy of psychological sciences of Ukraine, is one of the methods used to gain insight into the unconscious mechanisms of the psyche. The process of psychocorrection in ASPE groups is built on the activation of such innate psychological mechanisms. Education is carried out through a mediate method of self-cognition,

without imposing theoretical knowledge on the individual, which could be incomprehensible without its practical presentation. Activities in the group of active social and psychological education are based on the principles of interpersonal interaction, among others: unprejudiced judgment, voluntary participation, acceptance of others, confidentiality, empathy (Yatsenko, 2006).

The process of restoring psychological balance allows a person to achieve full recovery through psychocorrection work in the group of active social and psychological education. Yatsenko's psychodynamic approach is oriented towards providing insight into the subconscious mind through its indirect, symbolic representation in pictures. Painting, nonverbal exercises, role-playing, psychodrama, work with subject models, dialogue – these are the methods of practical psychology which allow for the recognition of the unconscious motives of the individual's behavior based on his/her conscious goals and expectations.

The basis of our empirical research is group psychocorrection work. The group should include 10–12 people of a range of ages and both genders. Group sessions take place in a specially equipped room, in which all participants, along with the psychologist, sit in a circle. Treatment duration is 12 days, 8 hours daily. At the beginning of the group session the participants are allowed to become familiar with each other by taking part in exercises which build mutual trust and group cohesion. This is followed by deep psychic work which ends with the participants providing mutual feedback.

Statement of the problem

Internally displaced students and scientists suffer from insecurity, diffidence, anxiety and nightmares. War impacts civilians' mental health. Children who are eyewitness to military operations become irritable, restless, depressed, they lose interest in play and social intercourse (Yule, Dyregrov, Raundalen & Smith, 2013), display negative behavior (Cohen, 2015), and often relive traumatic experiences through repetitive play (Tarabrina, 2001). Adults exhibit distrust, irritability, social stigma, the fear of being kidnapped, nonobservance of law and order, and increased vigilance. They suffer infringements of personal security (military attacks, intimidation), nightmares, incertitude of future life, psychological pressure, and lack of information. Additionally, they experience

negative thoughts and dispositions; slow down or speed up their reactions to external stimulus (Pidlisetska, 2014). They are forced to adapt to a new culture in other regions of their country, endure disappointment, loss, and face cultural shock (Voznesenska, 2015). As Shaferyuk writes: “The settlers who move to new territories (especially in Ukraine, where the East and the West have very different cultural traditions and customs), note “micro-cultural shock” when they enter the new microenvironment and a rejection reaction to “strangers” among the local population comes to light” (Shaferyuk, 2014: 147).

Internally displaced persons have specific, socio-psychological features. Women who had to flee with their children and elderly relatives have experienced a significant burden of personal responsibility for families. Zagarnicz'ka investigated the phenomenon of childhood as exposed to military conflict. She describes the problems of children's social development during military conflict. The author distinguishes the following effects of hostilities on children's growth: danger to a child's life and health; increased child poverty; destruction of familiar lifestyle; problems with access to education; being raised in broken families; the pressure of propaganda; value crisis; and psychological traumas. Displaced people are afraid to renounce their self-identity, which complicates their adaptation to the new conditions of life and assimilation into their new community. Pilhanchuk (2015) describes the spheres of life which influence the formation of identity: choosing a profession, accepting and revaluing one's religious and moral beliefs, political position, social roles, integral perception of one's life and behavior, self-perception and self-determination. As a result of the ongoing social crisis, Ukrainian students have lost the prospect for professional development, which affects their self-identity and self-acceptance.

Internal migrants experience solitude and isolation in this situation; they feel passive, trapped in victimhood, experience depression and subordination. In Kisarchuk's words: “the temporarily moved individuals feel states of despondence, irritation, “emotional stupor”, and frequent depressive episodes. As to changes in the psyche, there is a worsening of memory and concentration of attention, inadvertence, forgetfulness, a change of life principles and plans for the future” (Kisarchuk, et al., 2015: 44).

The occupation of certain regions of Ukraine led to a situation in which Ukrainians had to solve such dilemmas as whether to accept the burdensome standards of activity and laws imposed by occupiers, or abandon the old traditions in

favor of new rules and regulations in peaceful areas of the state. This caused conflicts among the displaced persons, members of their families, and friends. Therefore, most displaced persons have experienced the loss of family support as a result of conflicting values, aspirations and political convictions.

The majority of Ukrainian teens and young men witness violence, which causes psychological trauma. The consequence of psychological trauma is inhibited adaptation. Passivity, apathy and increased aggression are considered to be the manifestations of disadaptation. The students who were forcedly displaced from the occupied territories of Ukraine have developed new character traits and attitudes, such as low self-esteem, unwillingness to accept new social roles, avoidance of current events, and increased anxiety. Forced migrants in Ukraine are losing a sense of stability and security, which leads to violations of interpersonal relationships.

One of the causes of social disadaptation of displaced students is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Among the traumatic events that may trigger PTSD are those which threaten human life or may cause serious bodily injury; they are related to witnessing appalling images of death and injury of others, to violent or sudden death of a loved one, and other stress factors. Scientists describe two effective adaptation strategies to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder: a purposeful return to traumatic memories for their psychological analysis, and a study of personality and awareness by the subject to discover the true causes of traumatic events from the point of view of an ordinary person (Pischelko & Sochy'vko, 2003). The displaced students witnessed sudden deaths of civilians, which caused acute stress. They were unable to receive initial psychological assistance to level the shock. Therefore, in most cities of Ukraine, psychologists organized self-help groups. In these groups, the internally displaced persons discussed similar psychological difficulties. As indicated above, exposure to non-internally displaced persons is of great importance for the displaced in the process of their reintegration; the ability of both groups to express their attitudes towards each other allows mutual understanding.

The process of integrating the displaced students into social groups creates certain difficulties in their communicative interactions. There is often a language barrier in the learning process – students from the central regions of Ukraine study in Ukrainian language, while students from the East of Ukraine speak mainly Russian. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that all students

are the citizens of one state, but they defend opposing political and personal beliefs. If a person's views differ from the accepted positions in a group, the phenomenon of "bullying" – physical, psychological or economic abuse of another child will take a place (Bochkor & Dubrovs'ka & Zales'ka, 2014). We are convinced that the above-mentioned difficulties may be overcome during rehabilitation work with both the internally displaced students and the remaining students at the university.

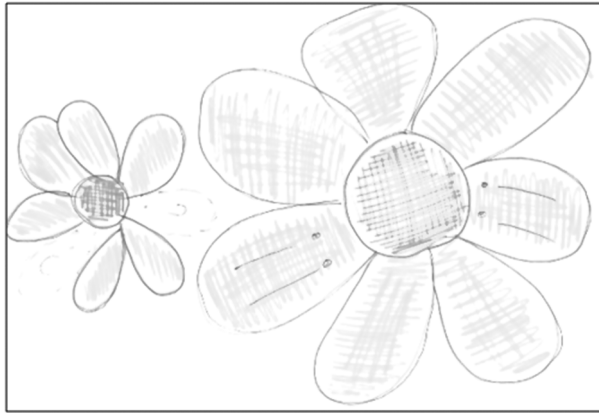
Research results

The displaced students from Lugansk region were transferred to the Faculty of Psychology at the Bohdan Kkmeľnytsky Cherkasy National University. They commenced their study immediately with all our students in educational groups. Since in the process of professional training, future psychologists are taught the skill of self-perception and self-conception, we use the practice of group psychocorrection as an obligatory part of their professional education.

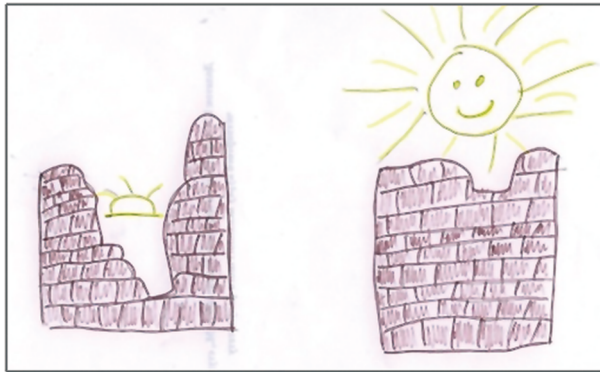
During the psychocorrection studies, displaced students join a group of other students who are studying at the university on a regular basis. This contributes to the leveling of interpersonal conflicts, since every participant develops a tolerant attitude, and learns to recognize each person's individuality. In psychocorrection groups, the recognition of the participant's own values is enabled through the self-actualization of self-knowledge values. This is achieved through the method of active social and psychological education. The processes of positive disintegration and secondary integration are characteristic for groups which follow the program of active social and psychological education. Positive integration is a testament to the overcoming of students' psychological trauma and the harmonization of their psyche. As a result of the psychocorrection practice, the index of displaced students' anxiety was reduced and memories about the military operations faded.

The effectiveness of the process of psychocorrection through active social and psychological education in the context of leveling the destructive effects of trauma are confirmed in the results of contemporary scientists' research projects and self-reports of participants, conducted and written after the completion of psychocorrection studies. These participant self-reports are in the form

of questionnaires which reveal their experiences and introspection. As part of the self-report, the participants were asked to answer the following question: "How did studying in the group of active social and psychological education affect your personal development?" The students described their feelings and expressed them by drawing pictures. Below are sample drawings prepared by students during their activities in the psychocorrection group on the subject: "I'm before classes. I'm after group session" (pictures 1–4).

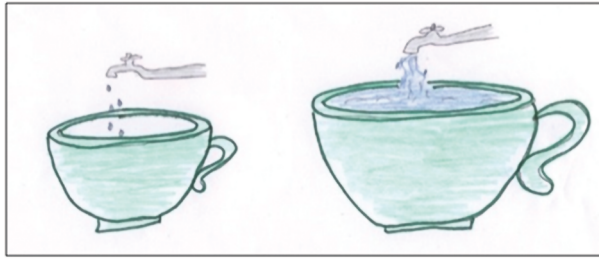


Pic. 1. "I'm before classes. I'm after group session"



Pic. 2. "I'm before classes. I'm after group session"

A psychologist has to interpret the drawings of each person in the group. This is usually done by analyzing the participant's picture and asking her or him about its symbols. Sample symbols are presented in pictures 1–4, showing the



Pic. 3. “I’m before classes. I’m after group session”



Pic. 4. “I’m before classes. I’m after group session”

dynamics of an individual’s transformation during the psychocorrective process. The participants described their own positive dynamics symbolized by representations such as more beautiful flowers in the pictures (pic. 1), brighter sunshine (pic. 2), a full cup of water (pic. 3), a richer book (pic. 4). They felt progress in their self-perception and the perception of other members of the group of active social and psychological education. As opposed to the positive development upon the completion of the session, at admission they reported a sense of inconsistency, inner emptiness, and the need for a search for answers to vitally important issues.

The participants’ self-reports were analyzed in the active social and psychological educational group. They showed a positive effect on individuals, as there were improvements in self-perception, a broader awareness of their own feelings and desires, acceptance and understanding of other people’s behavior, strengthened social positions, while their prospects for the future and the ability to rethink one’s life experience expanded. Additionally, students experienced an increased level of self-perception, a desire for self-improvement, and

knowledge of their own problems based on the examples of other group members. As a result, the psychocorrection sessions formed tolerance towards other people ("I became more respectful and kinder to people"), aided the leveling of aggression ("I became less aggressive"), understanding of one's contribution to conflict situations and one's abilities to level and admit responsibility for conflicts ("I can see where I was wrong, I'm trying to correct my mistakes. Now as for me, it is much easier to admonish the conflict than to deal with it, when it has gained ground"). Further, balance ("I became wiser and well-balanced") as well as the ability to restrain one's emotions improved ("I learned to hold back and not to be cruel"), while indicators of inner peace ("I gained inner peace") and the attitude to parents and the people around them became optimized ("Relationships with family and friends have changed").

The use of images in psychocorrection practice is associated with the development of the method of art therapy in psychology. The participants of the group of active social and psychological education do not need to be skilled painters, as the main purpose of drawing is to express their own feelings and emotions. The process of using colours and free drawing helps to defuse mental stress, which is an important step towards the rehabilitation of individuals in their new conditions of life. In active social and psychological training groups, we propose group members to select the desired theme of their pictures or alternatively to invent it at the end of their painting. This method makes it possible to direct the dialogue between a psychologist and a participant towards developing a person's sense of introspection.

We distinguished several indexes of the students' changes. These are: openness to new experiences; unbiased comments; high level of self-control; remaining faithful to one's beliefs; ability to form relationships; liberation from stereotypical perceptions; skills of self-therapy; improvement in communication; understanding of cognitive prerequisites of various emotional states; taking into account one's contribution to misunderstandings with other people; awareness of stereotypically destructive tendencies in behavior which are not productive for communication; the ability to communicate adequately; the ability to assess the situation; the ability to predict tendencies in their development and to accept psychological responsibility for one's behavior; a sense of psychological security; and a retrospective analysis of the history of one's life and past experiences.

Conclusions

The process of reintegration of internally displaced persons consists in ensuring their social and psychological security. Psychological assistance is given to create conditions for the understanding of the negative impact of their own traumatic experiences connected with military operations. Trauma is the driving force in the formation of somatic disorders, internal conflicts and suffering, which impair relationships with other people. Students who have experienced trauma, have a limited awareness of their potential resulting from fears and barriers to personal growth. Displaced persons, who suffer emotional distress, have a distorted perception of the actual situation, revalued or undervalued opportunities, experience increased anxiety and destructive emotional states. Psychological support includes working with these students on recognizing their psychological trauma. The next step is to develop an adequate perception of social and psychological conditions in which the displaced persons currently live, and to facilitate their self-realization. Forced migrants are burdened by the reluctance to accept the rules of another region. This complicates the process of students' adaptation, and leads to their subsequent need for rehabilitation. The purpose of psychological support is to form the students' self-assuredness and future prospects.

We believe that the process of readaptation of refugee students can be improved on the condition that psychocorrective practice within educational programs is implemented in higher education institutions. Group psychological sessions are aimed at introducing the displaced students to the present learning environment, leveling their personal difficulties and complexes. We see prospects for further research on the improvement of methodological tools in psychocorrection groups for the rehabilitation of Ukrainian citizens who are internally displaced persons.

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