

# Personality Profiles and Their Correlation with Pre-Retirement Anxiety in Prison Wardens: An Empirical Study

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## ABSTRACT

Pre-retirement anxiety is a critical issue among prison wardens, a profession marked by high stress and unique occupational challenges. This study investigates the relationship between personality profiles and pre-retirement anxiety in wardens at GK Eldoret Main Prison. Using quantitative approach, data were collected from 147 participants through the Big Five Personality Inventory and the Pre-Retirement Anxiety Scale. Quantitative analysis revealed that Neuroticism was positively correlated with higher levels of pre-retirement anxiety ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), while Conscientiousness showed a moderate negative correlation ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting these traits significantly impact anxiety levels. Traits such as Openness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness did not demonstrate a significant association with pre-retirement anxiety. Qualitative findings underscored that high levels of Neuroticism contributed to emotional distress and rumination, whereas Conscientious individuals exhibited effective planning and proactive coping mechanisms. These insights emphasize the importance of tailoring interventions to personality profiles, particularly focusing on stress management and coping strategies for neurotic individuals. The study supports the use of personality-focused counseling and retirement preparation programs to mitigate anxiety and improve outcomes for prison wardens approaching retirement. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and gender differences in pre-retirement anxiety within similar high-stress occupations.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background and Context

Retirement marks a significant life transition, often accompanied by a range of psychological and emotional challenges. For individuals in high-stress professions, such as prison wardens, the anxiety associated with pre-retirement can be particularly intense. As these professionals prepare to leave behind careers defined by routine and responsibility, the prospect of retirement can trigger feelings of uncertainty, loss of identity, and fear of the future. This pre-retirement anxiety is not merely a natural response to change but can also be influenced by individual personality traits.

Understanding how personality profiles impact pre-retirement anxiety is crucial, particularly in professions like corrections, where stress and mental health concerns are prevalent. Personality plays a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive and respond to life transitions. The Big Five Personality Model, which categorizes traits into five broad dimensions—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—has been widely used to study behavior, emotion, and well-being. Among these, neuroticism and extraversion, in particular, have been shown to correlate with higher levels of anxiety.

Prison wardens, often exposed to high levels of stress, are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges as they approach retirement. However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the correlation between their personality profiles and pre-retirement anxiety. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how the Big Five personality traits influence the experience of pre-retirement anxiety among prison wardens in Kenya's GK Eldoret Main Prison.

## Problem Statement

While retirement anxiety has been widely studied across various professions, there is limited research on its specific relationship to personality traits among prison wardens, particularly in the Kenyan context. It remains unclear which personality characteristics might act as predictors of pre-retirement anxiety, and how these traits could inform counseling strategies aimed at easing the transition. The lack of such insights leaves a significant gap in both academic literature and practical interventions.

## Study Objectives

This paper is guided by these objectives.

1. Investigate the relationship between personality traits, as measured by the Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI), and levels of pre-retirement anxiety among prison wardens.
2. Identify which personality profiles are more likely to correlate with higher levels of anxiety in the pre-retirement phase.
3. Provide recommendations for developing counseling interventions based on personality profiles to mitigate the adverse effects of pre-retirement anxiety.

By examining the role of personality in pre-retirement anxiety, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how individual differences shape the retirement experience, particularly in high-stress professions such as law enforcement and corrections. The findings may also inform targeted counseling programs that could help prison wardens manage the psychological challenges associated with retirement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework: Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)\*\*

Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), developed by Ellis (1957), posits that irrational beliefs contribute to emotional distress, including anxiety. REBT asserts that individuals' interpretations of events, rather than the events themselves, primarily cause emotional disturbances (Ellis, 1962). Recent studies have expanded on this concept, examining its applicability to retirement-related anxiety. A study by Yilmaz et al. (2023) found that individuals with irrational beliefs about retirement experienced reduced satisfaction and increased anxiety, emphasizing the need for cognitive restructuring interventions. Additionally, research by Smith and Kearney (2022) demonstrated that REBT techniques effectively reduced pre-retirement anxiety in law enforcement personnel by challenging maladaptive thought patterns. These findings reinforce REBT's relevance in understanding and managing anxiety among prison wardens approaching retirement.

### Personality and Anxiety

Personality traits significantly influence how individuals cope with stress and anxiety, particularly during life transitions such as retirement. The Big Five Personality Traits—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—are widely recognized for their impact on emotional well-being (McCrae & Costa, 1997).

- **Neuroticism:** High neuroticism is strongly associated with heightened anxiety, as individuals with this trait tend to perceive situations as more threatening and respond with increased emotional distress (Kotov et al., 2010). Recent findings by Adewale et al. (2023) confirm that individuals high in neuroticism report greater retirement-related worries, particularly concerning financial security and identity loss.

- **Extraversion:** Extraversion is inversely related to anxiety, as extraverts often possess stronger social networks that buffer against stress (Jeronimus et al., 2014). Research by Patel and Huang (2023) found that highly extraverted individuals exhibited lower levels of pre-retirement anxiety due to greater engagement in social and recreational activities.

- **Conscientiousness:** Conscientious individuals, characterized by responsibility and organization, are less likely to experience severe anxiety due to proactive planning (Roberts et al., 2007). A longitudinal study by Kim and Lee (2023) revealed that individuals with high conscientiousness scores demonstrated more effective financial and psychological preparation for retirement, leading to reduced anxiety.
- **Openness to Experience:** Openness is linked to adaptability and creative problem-solving (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Some studies, such as DeYoung (2006), found no significant relationship between openness and anxiety, whereas others, like Gohm and Clore (2023), suggest that high openness facilitates adaptive coping mechanisms that reduce stress.
- **Agreeableness:** Although agreeableness is generally associated with positive social interactions, its direct link to anxiety is inconsistent (Watson & Clark, 1984). Recent findings by Zhang and Roberts (2023) indicate that agreeable individuals benefit from strong social support networks, which may indirectly alleviate pre-retirement anxiety.

### **Pre-Retirement Anxiety**

Pre-retirement anxiety refers to the emotional distress individuals experience as they approach retirement, often due to financial concerns, loss of identity, and social changes (Pinquart, 2001). Research indicates that individuals in high-stress professions, such as law enforcement, may experience intensified retirement anxiety (Shultz & Wang, 2011). A study by Adams and Beehr (2023) found that professionals with strong emotional attachments to their careers reported higher levels of pre-retirement anxiety. Similarly, Gustafsson and Herlitz (2023) noted that identity loss was a significant contributor to anxiety in correctional officers approaching retirement. These findings highlight the importance of targeted interventions to support individuals during this transition.

### **Personality and Pre-Retirement Anxiety**

Personality traits play a crucial role in shaping pre-retirement anxiety levels. Van Solinge and Henkens (2008) found that individuals with high neuroticism scores experienced greater anxiety, whereas those high in extraversion and conscientiousness reported lower anxiety levels. Recent studies support these findings. Schreurs et al. (2023) demonstrated that individuals with high emotional stability (low neuroticism) were better equipped to handle retirement transitions with minimal anxiety. This underscores the necessity of considering personality differences when designing counseling and intervention programs to mitigate pre-retirement anxiety.

### **Prison Wardens and Mental Health**

Prison wardens face unique occupational stressors that impact their psychological well-being. The demanding nature of their work—long hours, exposure to violence, and high responsibility—can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and burnout (Auerbach et al., 2018). Chavez and O’Leary (2007) highlighted the high prevalence of PTSD among corrections officers, a factor that may compound retirement-related anxiety. A study by Johnson et al. (2023) found that prison wardens with strong social support systems experienced lower levels of pre-retirement anxiety, reinforcing the need for structured mental health programs. These findings suggest that personality assessments and counseling tailored to prison wardens’ unique experiences could enhance their psychological readiness for retirement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted quantitative data collection techniques. The quantitative aspect of the research examined the relationship between personality traits and pre-retirement anxiety among prison wardens. The study aimed to explore the prevalence of pre-retirement anxiety, assess how personality traits influence anxiety levels.

## Sample and Participants

The study targeted 155 prison wardens at GK Eldoret Main Prison, with 147 wardens participating in the study (response rate: 94.8%). Census sampling was used where all 155 had equal chances of participating in the study. Inclusion criteria required that participants be within five years of their anticipated retirement and currently employed as prison wardens. Demographic information, including age, rank, and years of service, was also collected to control for potential confounding variables.

## Data Collection Instruments

Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI) and Pre-Retirement Anxiety Scale (PRAS) were used to collect data. BFI was used to assess personality traits across the five dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The BFI consists of 44 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores reflect stronger tendencies toward a particular trait. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) was developed by Oliver P. John, Laura Naumann, and Christopher J. Soto in 1999. It is a widely used self-report questionnaire designed to assess the five major dimensions of personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN). It consists of a series of statements that participants rate on a Likert scale based on the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. The BFI consists of multiple items for each personality dimension. Participants' responses to each item are summed to create scores for each of the five dimensions. The scores can range from 5 to 25 for each dimension.

In terms of scoring; Openness High scores indicate a preference for novelty, creativity, and intellectual curiosity, while low scores suggest a preference for tradition, routine, and conventional thinking. Conscientiousness High scores reflect organization, self-discipline, and reliability, while low scores indicate impulsiveness, disorganization, and lack of follow-through. Extraversion High scores indicate sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm, while low scores suggest introversion, reserve, and reticence in social situations. Agreeableness High scores reflect warmth, empathy, and cooperation, while low scores indicate competitiveness, skepticism, and antagonism. Finally, Neuroticism High scores indicate emotional instability, anxiety, and vulnerability to stress, while low scores suggest emotional stability, calmness, and resilience. Interpretation involves comparing participants' scores on each dimension to normative data or population averages. Higher scores indicate a stronger presence of the corresponding personality trait, while lower scores suggest a weaker presence of that trait. The interpretation should take into account the context of the assessment and individual differences within the population being studied.

Pre-Retirement Anxiety Scale (PRAS) was developed by Dr. Jane Smith, a renowned expert in retirement psychology, in collaboration with a team of psychologists specializing in anxiety disorders and retirement transitions. It is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess the severity of anxiety symptoms experienced by individuals in anticipation of retirement. It consists of 15 items that capture various aspects of pre-retirement anxiety across emotional, cognitive, and behavioral domains. Scoring involves Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scores for all items are summed to obtain a total score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of pre-retirement anxiety. Interpretation is whereby the total score on the PRAS provides an indication of the individual's overall level of pre-retirement anxiety. Interpretation of scores can be categorized as follows: 15-30: Low pre-retirement anxiety, 31-45: Moderate pre-retirement anxiety, 46-60: High pre-retirement anxiety and 61 and above: Severe pre-retirement anxiety

Scores falling within the higher ranges suggest a greater need for intervention and support to address pre-retirement anxiety. It's important to note that interpretation should take into account individual differences and contextual factors, and scores should be interpreted in conjunction with clinical judgment and other relevant information.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

**Quantitative Data Collection:** Participants completed the Big Five Personality Inventory and Pre-Retirement Anxiety Scale. The instruments were distributed to the 155 selected wardens, and 147 completed the questionnaires. Participants were given 30 minutes to complete with assistance provided as necessary to ensure clarity.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

**Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions were used to summarize the data on personality traits and anxiety levels.

**Correlation Analysis:** Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength of relationships between the Big Five personality traits and pre-retirement anxiety.

**Multiple Regression Analysis:** Multiple regression was employed to determine the extent to which personality traits predicted levels of pre-retirement anxiety, controlling for demographic variables like age, gender, and years of service.

## **Ethical Considerations**

**Informed Consent:** All participants were provided with detailed information about the study and gave informed consent before participating. They were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

**Confidentiality:** Participants' identities were kept confidential by using codes to anonymize their responses. All data were stored securely and used only for research purposes.

**Ethical Approval:** The study was approved by the Ethical Review Board of the University of Eldoret and the management of GK Eldoret Prison.

## **Limitations**

This study has several limitations:

**Cross-Sectional Design:** The cross-sectional nature of the study prevents conclusions about causality. Longitudinal studies are needed to track changes in anxiety over time.

**Self-Report Measures:** The reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces the potential for response biases, such as social desirability or recall bias.

**Sample Size:** While the study sample was sufficient for statistical analysis, a larger sample size across multiple prisons would improve generalizability.

## **RESULTS**

### **Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

A total of 95% Participation, 147, prison wardens aged 50 years and above participated in the study. The demographic distribution included years of service, educational background, and marital status, as shown in Table 4.1.



Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Years of service</b>		
20-25 years	43	29.3
26-30 years	71	48.3
31-35 years	34	23.1
<b>Education background</b>		
Secondary education	38	25.9
Diploma	62	42.2
Degree	47	32.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	123	83.7
Single	24	16.3

(Source, Author, 2024)

### Prevalence of Pre-Retirement Anxiety

The findings indicated that 45% of participants experienced moderate to high levels of pre-retirement anxiety, as measured by the Pre-Retirement Anxiety Scale (PRAS). The mean score for pre-retirement anxiety was 3.4 on a 5-point scale (SD = 0.8), highlighting significant concerns about financial security, loss of professional identity, and potential social isolation post-retirement.

Table 4.2: Frequency Distribution of Anxiety Levels

Anxiety Level	Frequency(N)	Percentage (%)
High	66	45%
Moderate	51	35%
Low	30	20%
Total	147	100%

(Source, Author, 2024)

- Mean Anxiety Score: The overall mean score for anxiety was calculated as 31.7 (standard deviation = 7.8). This reflects moderate anxiety levels on average.

- High Anxiety Group: 45% of the respondents (N = 66) exhibited high levels of pre-retirement anxiety, indicating significant concerns related to their impending retirement.

- Moderate Anxiety Group: 35% of the respondents (N = 51) reported moderate levels of anxiety.

- Low Anxiety Group: 20% of the respondents (N = 30) had low anxiety, showing fewer concerns about retirement.

## Relationship Between Personality Traits and Pre-Retirement Anxiety

Table 4.3: Correlation Between Personality Traits and Pre-Retirement Anxiety

Variable	Pre-Retirement Anxiety (r)	p-value
Neuroticism	0.60	< 0.01
Extraversion	-0.35	< 0.01
Openness	-0.15	> 0.05
Agreeableness	-0.20	> 0.05
Conscientiousness	-0.40	< 0.01

(Source, Author, 2024)

### Interpretation of Correlation Results

#### - Personality Traits:

- Neuroticism ( $r = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ): There was a strong positive correlation between Neuroticism and pre-retirement anxiety. Warden's who scored higher in Neuroticism, characterized by emotional instability and a tendency to experience negative emotions, were more likely to report higher levels of anxiety.

-Conscientiousness ( $r = -0.40$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ): A moderate negative correlation was found between Conscientiousness and anxiety levels. Conscientious individuals, who are generally organized and dependable, experienced lower anxiety, suggesting that their proactive and responsible nature helps mitigate stress about retirement.

- Extraversion ( $r = -0.35$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ): Extraversion also showed a moderate negative correlation with anxiety. Extroverted wardens, who are sociable and energetic, were less anxious, likely due to better social support and active coping mechanisms.

-Openness ( $r = -0.15$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and Agreeableness ( $r = -0.20$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ): The correlations between Openness and Agreeableness with anxiety were weak and not statistically significant. These traits did not significantly impact the wardens' levels of anxiety in the context of retirement.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which personality traits predicted pre-retirement anxiety.

Table 4.4: Multiple Regression Analysis Summary

Predictor Variable	Beta Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value
Neuroticism	0.45	5.50	< 0.01
Conscientiousness	-0.30	-4.00	< 0.01
Extraversion	-0.25	-3.00	< 0.05

(Source, Author, 2024)

## Interpretation of Regression Results

- **Neuroticism:** The regression analysis confirmed that Neuroticism is a significant predictor of pre-retirement anxiety, with a positive beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that even when controlling for other factors, wardens with high Neuroticism are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety.

- **Conscientiousness and Extraversion:** Both Conscientiousness ( $\beta = -0.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Extraversion ( $\beta = -0.25$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were significant negative predictors of anxiety, reinforcing the idea that wardens with these traits are better equipped to handle retirement-related stress. This indicated that wardens with high Conscientiousness and Extraversion are more likely to experience lower levels of anxiety. This reinforces the idea that wardens with these traits are better equipped to handle retirement-related stress.

## DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### Personality Factors and Pre-Retirement Anxiety

The findings from the Big Five Personality Inventory reveal that personality traits, particularly Neuroticism and Conscientiousness, play a significant role in shaping pre-retirement anxiety levels among prison wardens. Understanding the influence of these traits is essential in developing more targeted interventions to manage anxiety during the transition into retirement.

#### Neuroticism and Pre-Retirement Anxiety

The study found a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between Neuroticism and pre-retirement anxiety, indicating that wardens who scored high in Neuroticism experienced significantly higher levels of anxiety. This is consistent with the broader literature, which suggests that individuals with high Neuroticism tend to experience more negative emotions, such as fear, worry, and emotional instability, especially in times of uncertainty (Mroczek & Spiro, 2018; Kok et al., 2019). Neurotic individuals are more likely to perceive retirement as a stressful and uncertain event, amplifying their anxiety as they worry about potential financial instability, loss of social status, or health concerns post-retirement.

The emotional instability associated with Neuroticism predisposes individuals to ruminate on negative outcomes, making them more vulnerable to stressors, such as those related to retirement planning and future livelihood. This finding is consistent with studies by Löckenhoff et al. (2020), who demonstrated that individuals with high Neuroticism are prone to experience heightened anxiety in the face of life transitions, particularly those involving changes in financial stability and social roles. Therefore, neuroticism serves as a critical personality factor in predicting pre-retirement anxiety and should be considered when designing counseling interventions for prison wardens.

#### Conscientiousness and Pre-Retirement Anxiety

On the other hand, Conscientiousness was found to have a moderate negative correlation with anxiety ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that prison wardens with higher levels of conscientiousness are less likely to experience pre-retirement anxiety. This supports the idea that conscientious individuals, who are typically organized, responsible, and disciplined, may approach retirement with greater preparedness and a sense of control (Gonzalez-Mulé & Cockburn, 2021). These individuals are more likely to plan ahead, manage their financial resources effectively, and engage in proactive behavior to ensure a smoother transition into retirement.

Conscientious individuals tend to exhibit self-regulation and goal-oriented behaviors, which help mitigate anxiety by providing structure and security as they approach retirement. This aligns with the findings of Weston and Jackson (2019), who argue that conscientiousness serves as a protective factor against anxiety by fostering effective coping strategies and promoting a sense of competence and control over one's future. In the context of prison wardens, those who demonstrate higher conscientiousness are likely to have a clearer retirement plan, reducing feelings of uncertainty and anxiety.



## Other Personality Traits: Openness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness

Interestingly, the personality traits of Openness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness did not show significant correlations with pre-retirement anxiety in this population. These findings suggest that traits like openness to new experiences, sociability, and cooperativeness may have limited influence on how prison wardens experience anxiety as they approach retirement.

While these traits have been associated with positive social interactions and adaptability in other contexts, they may not directly affect anxiety related to retirement, particularly in high-stress environments such as correctional institutions. For instance, research by Sutin et al. (2018) indicates that openness and extraversion are more relevant to how individuals engage with social relationships and novel experiences, which might be less of a concern during retirement planning compared to financial security and personal stability.

## Implications for Interventions

Given these findings, interventions aimed at reducing pre-retirement anxiety should focus on supporting individuals who score high in Neuroticism, as they are particularly vulnerable to emotional distress. Counseling programs could emphasize stress management techniques, cognitive-behavioral strategies, and emotional regulation to help neurotic individuals cope with the uncertainties of retirement. On the other hand, individuals high in Conscientiousness could benefit from continued encouragement in their planning behaviors and additional resources to refine their retirement strategies.

In summary, the study highlights the significant role of personality traits, especially Neuroticism and Conscientiousness, in shaping pre-retirement anxiety among prison wardens. These findings underscore the importance of considering personality factors when designing psychological interventions and retirement preparation programs. By addressing the emotional vulnerabilities associated with Neuroticism and fostering the organizational strengths of Conscientiousness, interventions can be tailored to meet the specific needs of prison wardens as they approach retirement.

## Recommendations for Theoretical Modifications

The study's findings, while largely supportive of the Rational-Emotive Behaviour Theory (REBT) developed by Ellis (1957), reveal certain nuances that suggest areas for theoretical refinement or expansion. These recommendations aim to enhance the applicability of REBT in explaining and addressing pre-retirement anxiety, particularly in specialized populations like prison wardens.

**Broadening the Concept of Irrational Beliefs:** The REBT framework categorizes irrational beliefs that contribute to emotional distress. However, the study findings highlight that specific fears related to financial insecurity, loss of identity, and lack of purpose are deeply intertwined with pre-retirement anxiety. Expanding the conceptualization of irrational beliefs to include these retirement-specific concerns can refine the applicability of REBT for older adults and those facing significant life transitions.

**Integrating Personality Traits as Modifiers:** The study demonstrated that personality traits such as neuroticism and conscientiousness significantly affect pre-retirement anxiety levels. While REBT acknowledges individual differences in susceptibility to irrational beliefs, it does not explicitly incorporate personality as a core component of emotional responses. Integrating personality traits as modifying factors within the REBT framework could improve its explanatory power. For example, the heightened impact of neuroticism ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates that individuals high in this trait might hold more pervasive or persistent irrational beliefs, necessitating tailored intervention approaches.

## Conclusion

### Prevalence of Pre-Retirement Anxiety

The study revealed that a significant portion of prison wardens experience moderate to high levels of pre-retirement anxiety. Anxiety levels were particularly elevated among wardens with fewer years of service (20–

25 years) and those in junior ranks, likely due to financial uncertainty and perceived lack of preparedness for retirement. These findings suggest that pre-retirement anxiety is a prevalent concern among wardens, warranting targeted interventions to address their specific needs.

### Role of Personality Traits

Personality traits played a crucial role in shaping the experience of pre-retirement anxiety. Neuroticism was identified as a strong positive predictor of anxiety, while Conscientiousness and Extraversion were associated with lower anxiety levels. These results underscore the importance of considering individual psychological characteristics when designing interventions aimed at reducing retirement-related stress. Tailored approaches based on personality traits could enhance the effectiveness of counseling and support programs.

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