

# Young Committed Relationship: Lived Experiences of Married Adolescent Males: A Scoping Review

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## ABSTRACT

Early marriage among adolescent males was a complex social phenomenon that significantly influenced their psychosocial development. While the experiences of young married females had been extensively studied, the lived experiences of married adolescent males remained underexplored. This scoping review aimed to bridge this gap by synthesizing existing literature on the identity development, relational dynamics, and sexual experiences of married adolescent males. The review systematically explored three core areas: self-perception and appearance, relational identity and role adjustment, and sexual identity and intimacy. Following the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, a systematic search across multiple databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, PubMed, and ERIC, alongside relevant grey literature, was conducted. Studies published between 2000 and 2024, focusing on adolescent males (aged 15–19) who were married, were included. Data were extracted, charted, and thematically analyzed, which revealed three major themes: (1) Self-Perception and Appearance, where young husbands deprioritized personal grooming due to economic pressures; (2) Relational Identity and Role Adjustment, which highlighted the emotional and decision-making challenges of early marriage; and (3) Sexual Identity and Intimacy, where initial sexual enthusiasm often declined due to stress and unmet expectations. The findings underscored the multifaceted challenges faced by married adolescent males, who navigated complex identity transitions while assuming adult responsibilities prematurely. This review highlighted the need for gender-sensitive interventions, inclusive sexuality education, and further research that foregrounded the voices of young married males.

**Keywords:** Psychosocial Development Relational Identity Sexual Identity Adolescent Males Early Marriage

## INTRODUCTION

In the Philippine context, marriage is not only a legal contract but also a culturally and religiously significant institution. Although the *Family Code of the Philippines* sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18, early and informal unions among adolescents continue to exist, particularly in rural, indigenous, and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. While considerable research has explored the impact of early marriage on adolescent females—often framed through lenses of reproductive health and gender vulnerability—there is a notable lack of attention to the lived experiences of married adolescent males. These young men, often thrust prematurely into adult roles, are expected to fulfill provider and protector responsibilities without adequate psychosocial support or preparation, challenging conventional understandings of adolescence as a period of exploration and growth.

This gender imbalance in research and policy visibility presents significant problems. Adolescent males in early marriages frequently face interrupted education, limited employment opportunities, and pressure to perform traditional masculine roles. These realities often push them into adult responsibilities before they are developmentally ready. Additionally, rigid gender norms discourage emotional expression and self-reflection, leaving many young husbands vulnerable to mental health issues and relational strain. Compounding these challenges is the lack of targeted programs or interventions that recognize their unique experiences—most available services are either gender-neutral or exclusively designed for young women.

The academic literature also reveals major gaps in understanding the experiences of married adolescent males. There is a scarcity of gender-inclusive studies that foreground their voices and realities. Longitudinal and qualitative research is particularly limited, as are investigations that consider intersectional factors such as ethnicity, regional location, religion, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, the increasing prevalence of informal unions and adolescent fatherhood has not been matched with sufficient empirical inquiry or policy response. These forms of relationships, while unofficial, carry profound emotional and economic consequences for adolescent males and are often invisible in state-level data or youth development programs.

Emerging social trends further complicate the experiences of young married males. Digital exposure to global perspectives on marriage and masculinity has created tension between traditional expectations and contemporary ideals. At the same time, the passage of *Republic Act No. 11596*, which bans child marriage in the Philippines, may reduce formal early marriages, yet informal unions persist and remain underregulated. This shifting legal landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for addressing adolescent relational dynamics. Simultaneously, increased awareness of mental health and youth well-being opens pathways for more holistic and inclusive research. A focused scoping review on the lived experiences of married adolescent males is therefore timely and necessary to inform policy, enrich academic discourse, and develop responsive programs tailored to their unique realities.

## METHOD

This study employed a scoping review design following the framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005), later enhanced by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010). The approach was selected due to the limited and scattered literature available on the lived experiences of married adolescent males, a population that remains underrepresented in both local and global research. A scoping review is particularly useful for examining broad and complex topics where the literature has not been comprehensively reviewed, and where a systematic synthesis can help identify key concepts, gaps, and directions for future inquiry.

### Formulating Research Questions

The review was guided by the central research question: *What is currently known about the lived experiences of married adolescent males in terms of identity development, including appearance, relationship, and sexuality?* This inquiry was supported by sub-questions that explored the psychological and social impacts of early marriage on young males, the cultural or peer-related factors influencing their decision to marry, and how these young husbands perceive their evolving roles and responsibilities. To address these questions, eligibility criteria were developed to guide the inclusion and exclusion of studies. Included in the review were empirical studies—whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method—that focused on adolescent males (aged 15–19) who were married, and discussed aspects of their lived experiences or identity development. Studies published in English between 2000 and 2024 were considered, including peer-reviewed journal articles, graduate theses, reports, and grey literature. Studies that focused solely on adolescent females or discussed early marriage in a purely demographic or legal sense without experiential analysis were excluded.

### Identifying and Retrieving Relevant Literature

A comprehensive search was conducted using databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, PubMed, and ERIC. Grey literature was also reviewed from sources like UNICEF, UNFPA, the Philippine Statistics Authority, and university repositories, including those of Bukidnon State University. Keywords such as “married adolescent males,” “early marriage,” “young husbands,” “lived experiences,” “identity development,” and “psychosocial effects” were used in various Boolean combinations (e.g., AND/OR) to locate relevant studies. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, and full texts were reviewed based on the inclusion criteria. Key information was extracted using a standardized data charting form that included author, year, country, study design, population details, findings related to identity development, and any theoretical framework applied.

## Selection of Studies Based on Inclusion Criteria

The selection of studies for this scoping review followed a systematic and transparent process to ensure that only relevant and credible literature was included. The process involved three stages: identification, screening, and eligibility assessment. Initially, all retrieved articles were organized using a reference management tool to remove duplicates. The remaining records were then screened by reading titles and abstracts to determine their relevance to the topic. Articles that clearly did not meet the criteria—such as those focusing exclusively on adolescent females, legal discussions without experiential data, or those outside the target age group—were excluded from further review.

The full texts of potentially relevant studies were then assessed in detail based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) the study must focus on married adolescent males, typically aged 15 to 19; (2) it must explore lived experiences, identity development, or psychosocial changes related to early marriage; (3) the study may be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method in design; (4) it must be published in English between the years 2000 and 2024; and (5) the source may include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic theses, government reports, or credible grey literature. Studies were excluded if they solely discussed female adolescents, lacked experiential or developmental insights, were purely theoretical, or were non-English publications without accessible data.

Each study was reviewed independently by two researchers to minimize selection bias and ensure objectivity. In cases of disagreement, the researchers discussed and reached a consensus based on the study's relevance to the research questions. Selected studies were then documented in a data extraction matrix for further thematic analysis. This methodical approach to study selection ensured the inclusion of literature that directly addresses the lived experiences and identity formation of married adolescent males—providing a focused foundation for the scoping review.

## Data Charting and Organization

Following the selection of eligible studies, a standardized data charting process was undertaken to systematically capture relevant information from each source. A **data extraction matrix** was developed to ensure consistency, accuracy, and transparency throughout the review. This matrix included key elements such as the author(s), year of publication, country of origin, study design and methodology, sample characteristics, focus of the study, theoretical framework (if any), and major findings related to identity development, appearance, relationship dynamics, and sexuality. Each included study was carefully reviewed and manually coded to extract both descriptive and analytical data that aligned with the research questions and objectives of the scoping review.

The process was conducted independently by two reviewers who first familiarized themselves with the full texts and then entered relevant data into the matrix. To maintain reliability and reduce bias, extracted data were cross-checked for consistency, and any discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. Themes and subthemes were then organized under broader categories inspired by Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, particularly focusing on indicators of identity development during adolescence. This approach allowed the reviewers to track not only the content but also the conceptual relevance of each study to the core areas of this research—namely, the lived experiences of married adolescent males in relation to appearance, relational roles, and sexual development.

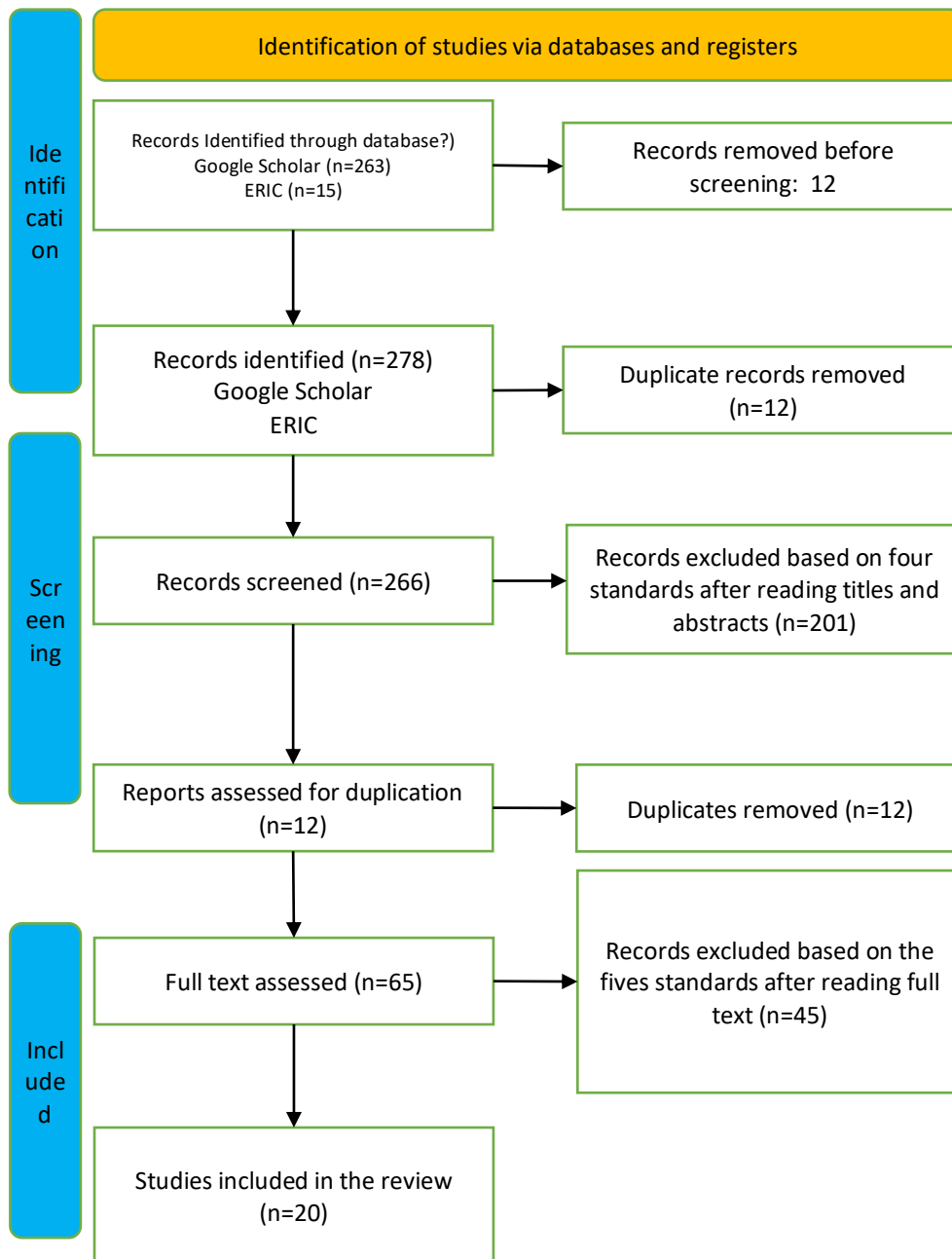
In addition to thematic data, contextual information such as sociocultural influences, economic conditions, peer dynamics, and emotional transitions were also documented, providing a comprehensive view of the adolescent male experience in early marriage. This organized extraction process served as the foundation for synthesizing key insights and identifying gaps in the current body of literature, ultimately supporting the analytical goals of the review.

## Data Synthesis, Analysis, and Interpretation

The final stage of the scoping review involved a systematic content analysis to discern recurring themes,

emerging patterns, and critical insights across the selected studies. The extracted data were synthesized and systematically summarized to illuminate significant findings, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of culturally responsive mathematics instruction. Additionally, a conceptual framework was developed, grounded in the existing literature, to provide a structured, theoretical representation of culturally responsive mathematics pedagogy within the dynamic and evolving landscape of contemporary education. This framework serves as a foundational model for future research and instructional practice in the field.

The nitty-gritty of the flow of this scoping review is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow chart of Searching, Selecting, and Abstracting Articles for the Scoping Review

## RESULTS

The scoping review identified and synthesized a total of 20 relevant studies that explored various aspects of early marriage among adolescent males, including identity development in terms of appearance, relationships, and sexuality. The findings reflect both local insights (such as the experiences of young husbands in the Philippines) and broader international perspectives. The thematic synthesis revealed that early marriage imposes substantial psychological, emotional, and social transitions on adolescent males, many of whom are unprepared for the complex demands of marital life.

One prominent theme that emerged was the shift in self-perception and appearance. Several studies, including Sabilla et al. (2023), found that adolescent males often deprioritized personal grooming and physical appearance after marriage, citing economic hardship and family responsibilities as the main reasons. This supports Zubair and Ali's (2021) observation that body image becomes a secondary concern for young husbands who are burdened with daily survival. Interestingly, the role of the wife emerged as a significant influence on the husband's appearance, suggesting a shift in agency and decision-making within marital roles.

In terms of relational identity, young husbands were found to navigate intense and often conflicting emotional terrain. The review highlights common experiences such as frequent disputes at home, dependency on parental support, and a lack of preparedness for decision-making responsibilities. Peer pressure also surfaced as a major influence on marriage decisions, as several adolescent males reported being encouraged—or even pressured—by their peers to marry early. These findings align with the study by Sagita (2019), which emphasizes the influence of social groups on adolescent behavior, and support the interpretation that early marriage may be a response to social conformity rather than maturity or readiness.

Another key area of discussion is sexual identity and intimacy. Married adolescent males initially reported heightened sexual activity, but most noted a decline in sexual intimacy over time, largely due to stress, physical exhaustion, and emotional detachment. This finding resonates with Young (2020) and Nidirect (2023), who note that loss of libido and relational fatigue are common in early unions, especially when financial and emotional support structures are lacking. The studies reviewed consistently reported that these young men had limited understanding of healthy sexual relationships, suggesting the need for comprehensive sexuality education tailored not only to females but also to adolescent males.

## DISCUSSION

Taken together, the findings emphasize that early marriage significantly alters adolescent males' developmental trajectories. The early assumption of adult roles, economic pressure, and emotional immaturity often result in identity confusion—a psychosocial crisis Erikson (1959) theorized as central to adolescence. Most reviewed studies suggest that the challenges faced by young husbands are not only relational or economic but also deeply personal and identity-based. However, despite these challenges, some adolescent males described positive adjustments over time, particularly when familial or community support was present.

This scoping review highlights a critical gap in gender-inclusive adolescent research, as the voices and experiences of married adolescent males are still largely overlooked in academic, policy, and programmatic spaces. These findings call for further qualitative research, particularly longitudinal studies, to understand how early marriage impacts adolescent boys' long-term identity development, mental health, and relationship satisfaction. Moreover, there is a need for interventions that support both partners in early marriages—through life skills training, psychosocial counseling, and family-centered guidance programs.

### A. Self-Perception and Appearance

One of the most notable shifts among married adolescent males is in how they perceive and manage their **appearance**. Prior to marriage, many adolescent males express concern for grooming, fashion, and self-image as part of their identity formation and peer interactions. However, several studies revealed that once they entered marriage, attention to appearance was deprioritized. This change is often rooted in the assumption of adult responsibilities, particularly economic burdens. As they become providers, the time, energy, and resources once spent on self-care are redirected toward fulfilling the basic needs of their spouse or family. In some cases, young husbands reported feeling that maintaining appearance was no longer relevant to their role as a married man. Interestingly, some respondents in the Sabilla et al. (2023) study indicated that their wives played a role in influencing or even dictating how they presented themselves physically, showing a shift in control or influence within the relationship. This suggests that early marriage may not only impact self-esteem but also shift decision-making dynamics related to personal identity.



## B. Relational Identity and Role Adjustment

Marriage during adolescence rapidly transitions young males into relational roles they are often emotionally unprepared for. Many studies reviewed noted that **relational identity** becomes a source of internal conflict and stress. Adolescent husbands frequently expressed struggles with communication, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation within their marital relationships. The role of “husband” is traditionally associated with authority, leadership, and provision—roles that many adolescent boys, due to their age and limited life experience, find difficult to fulfill. The pressure to perform these adult roles leads some to rely heavily on their parents, not only for financial support but also for emotional guidance and marital problem-solving. Moreover, peer pressure emerged as a key factor influencing the decision to marry. In some communities, marriage is seen as a badge of maturity or masculinity, pushing boys to enter committed relationships even when unready. This aligns with Erikson’s stage of identity vs. role confusion, where the adolescent seeks to define self while facing contradictory expectations from family, peers, and culture.

## C. Sexual Identity and Intimacy

Sexual identity and intimacy also shift considerably after adolescent males enter early marriages. At the onset of marriage, many young husbands report heightened sexual activity driven by curiosity, novelty, and social validation. However, as financial and emotional stress accumulates, a **decline in sexual intimacy** is frequently noted. Many participants across the studies reported experiencing fatigue, irritability, and diminished libido—factors often exacerbated by poor communication with their partners and lack of sexual education. The initial expectations of constant sexual fulfillment are challenged by the realities of marriage, including child-rearing responsibilities, unmet expectations, and emotional disconnect. This often leads to confusion, frustration, or feelings of inadequacy. In addition, limited access to reproductive and relationship education for young males contributes to misconceptions and unmet needs in sexual relationships. This underscores the importance of including adolescent boys in comprehensive sex and relationship education programs that go beyond anatomy to include communication, consent, emotional intimacy, and respect.

## Emergent Framework

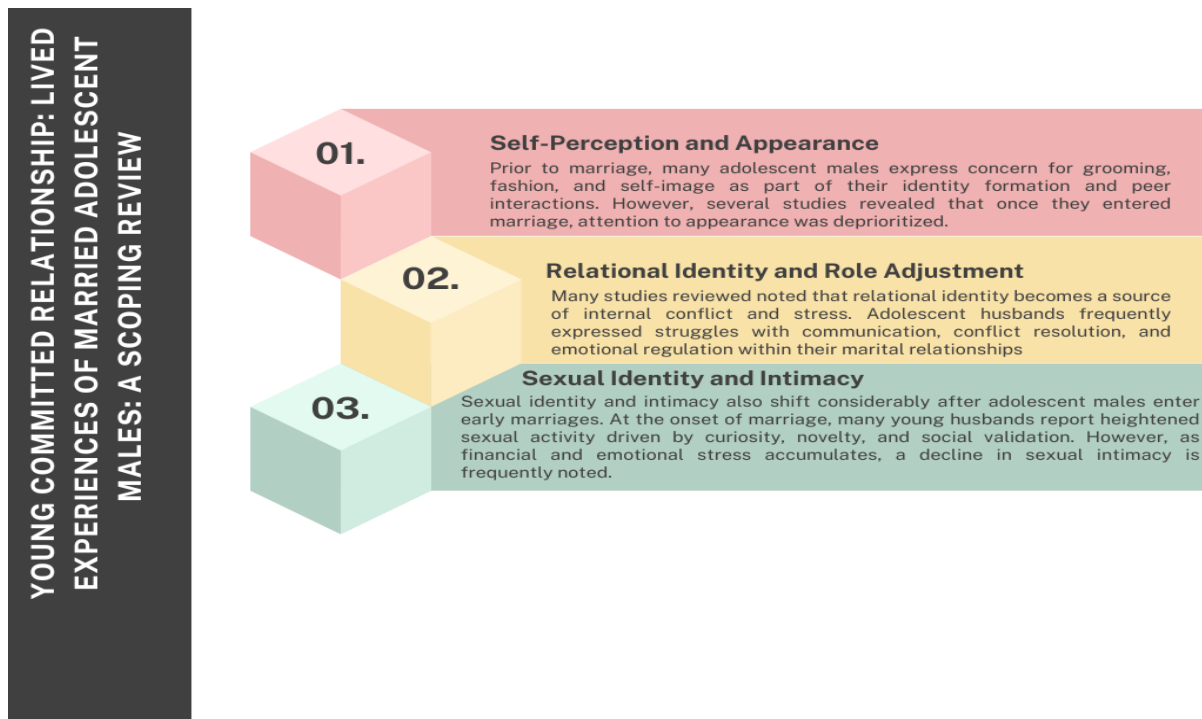
The scoping review revealed three interrelated frameworks that describe how married adolescent males experience identity development in the context of early marriage. These frameworks align with Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory, particularly the stage of identity versus role confusion, which is critical during adolescence. The first emergent framework centers on appearance and self-image, where young husbands were found to deprioritize their physical appearance after marriage due to the pressures of providing for their families. This shift reflects how socioeconomic responsibility redefines self-perception and redirects attention from individual grooming to marital obligations.

The second framework involves relational identity, highlighting how adolescent males assume adult roles—such as husband, provider, and decision-maker—without sufficient emotional or cognitive readiness. These roles are often shaped by external influences like peer pressure, traditional gender expectations, and continued dependence on parental support. As a result, many young husbands struggle with marital responsibilities, communication, and conflict resolution, which may lead to confusion about their evolving identity within the relationship.

The third framework focuses on sexual identity and intimacy, where young males initially experience heightened sexual activity but often encounter a decline in intimacy due to stress, fatigue, and unmet emotional needs. With limited access to sexual education and relational guidance, these adolescents face challenges in navigating physical and emotional intimacy in their marriages. This framework illustrates how their sexual development is not only biological but also shaped by their relational experiences and lack of preparedness for long-term partnership.

Collectively, these three frameworks offer a developmental perspective on how early marriage impacts the identity formation of adolescent males. They underscore the importance of recognizing young husbands as a vulnerable group whose psychosocial development is shaped by premature role transitions, external

expectations, and limited institutional support. These insights provide a valuable foundation for future research, gender-sensitive interventions, and youth development policies.



**Figure 2.** Emergent Framework on Young Committed Relationship: Lived Experiences of Married Adolescent Males

## CONCLUSION

This scoping review examined the lived experiences of married adolescent males, with particular focus on how early marriage affects identity development in the areas of appearance, relational roles, and sexuality. The findings reveal that adolescent males who enter into early marriages often undergo abrupt and challenging transitions into adult responsibilities. These include financial provision, emotional labor, and relational decision-making, despite a lack of adequate maturity or preparation. The review also identified that early marriage frequently results in diminished self-care, relational stress, and a decline in sexual intimacy, often stemming from emotional fatigue and unmet expectations. These changes significantly influence the identity formation process, highlighting a psychosocial conflict between emerging self-concept and imposed marital roles. Most notably, the voices and needs of married adolescent males remain underrepresented in both academic literature and programmatic interventions. Therefore, the study underscores the importance of acknowledging young husbands as a vulnerable group in the discourse on early marriage.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, this study puts forward several recommendations. First, there is a need to develop and implement gender-sensitive and adolescent-specific interventions that address the unique challenges faced by married adolescent males. Programs should offer psychosocial support, life skills training, and emotional development workshops that are tailored to young men transitioning into adult roles. Second, comprehensive sexuality education should be made more inclusive, equipping adolescent males with the knowledge and skills to navigate emotional intimacy, sexual health, and responsible fatherhood. Third, further research—especially longitudinal and qualitative studies—is recommended to understand the long-term implications of early marriage on young males' personal development, mental health, and social integration. Lastly, policy makers and community institutions should create inclusive youth development policies that recognize the shared burden of early marriage between young men and women, and allocate resources to support both.

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