

Gender Equality in the Family: Myanmar Context

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Abstract

In international law, the protection of the family is closely linked to the principle of equality and non-discrimination, meaning that all members of a family must enjoy the same liberties and rights regardless of gender or age (Baxter. 1992). Gender equality begins at home, and families are at the front lines of change. For the next generation, the examples set at home by parents, care-givers and extended family are shaping the way they think about gender and equality. This research examines the effects of full-time and part-time employment of women on various aspects of a household's arrangements. It argues that only full-time employment represents a significant transformation in women's roles, thus providing the bargaining resources that allow them to affect the household's arrangements. The authors see part-time involvement in market work as a way to maintain, rather than change, the traditional division of labor. Data were derived from a cross-sectional survey of 197 households; 152 married couples and their families were included in the analysis. An index of husbands' relative involvement in housework was constructed from 25 items focusing on division of housework activities. Logistic regression was used to assess associations between husbands' involvement in housework. Based on data collected in the year 2018 and 2019 from a representative sample of the Myanmar population, the authors find that although full-time employment contributes to gender equality within the household, part-time employment does not. Husbands of fully employed wives are more likely to participate in housework chores that are female-dominated, and full-time employed women are more likely than housewives to take part in the household's financial

and expenditure responsibilities. Part-time workers gain no advantage over housewives within their families.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Family, Full-time and part-time employment, Myanmar

Introduction

The study examined whether full-time and part-time employment of women can affect gender equality in the family in Myanmar. In this research, we focus on three areas of activity — housework, responsibility for household expenditures, and money management — to examine whether households in which women are employed full-time are more prone to operate under egalitarian arrangements than other households are. The main reason for this practical research is to examine to what extent women's full-time employment increases men's participation in activities traditionally dominated by women and whether, at the same time, full-time employed women became more involved in male domains. Another aim is to analyse whether women's employment affect money arrangement and household expenditures in the family in Myanmar. The paper makes use of descriptive survey and questionnaire concerning financial arrangements and the allocation of responsibilities within the family.

The survey is done based on the family and gender-role attitudes. One hundred and fifty-two married couples filled in the questionnaire. It has been long regarded that employment of women is an important determinant of the household's organization. Specifically, it is argued that women's employment leads to more egalitarian relations in the household. The labor force participation of women, especially married women, has been increasing. As a result, women's share of the labor force is now approaching that of men (Bianchi. 2000). According to Bianchi (2000), men and women are more likely to share the household responsibilities when the woman is employed fulltime, but this is much less likely when the woman is employed part-time. Studies that examined households' money arrangement generally found that women's employment increases their access to the household's money resources and increases their involvement in financial responsibilities (Vogler. 1998). The study showed that the role of full-time and part-time employment of women can change the household responsibilities and money arrangement in the family in Myanmar.

Methodology

The analysis is based on data collected in the 2019 from a representative

sample in upper Myanmar. The survey was part of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) project on family and gender-role attitudes. In addition to attitude items, the questionnaire administered included supplementary questions concerning financial arrangements and the allocation of responsibilities within the family. The total sample included 152 respondents. The sample was restricted to parents only because the authors are interested mainly in the relationship between mothers' employment and household responsibilities. All respondents provided detailed background and employment information for spouse as well as themselves. This made it possible to construct a couple's file so that information was provided on wife's and husband's characteristics and on household arrangements. Three dimensions of household activities are examined: housework, responsibility for household expenditures, and control of household finances. Respondents were asked to report who is primarily responsible for household chores (the wife, the husband, both equally, or a third person) in four different areas of housework. These included doing the laundry, home repairs, care for sick family members, and shopping. Of these, doing the laundry is a female-dominated activity and is also considered the least pleasant (Kaufmann & Petrocik. 1999); home

repairs is clearly a male-dominated task (Presser. 1994), and shopping is not gender specific and is considered (by both spouses) as a pleasant activity (Presser. 1994). Taking care of sick family members is a chore that has not been studied frequently in the context of family division of labor. Nonetheless, studies that have focused on care work within the household found that it tends to be women's chore (Aronson. 1992). In line with the proposition discussed earlier, it was expected that when women are employed full-time, less desirable tasks such as doing the laundry and taking care of sick family members become more equally shared. This, however, should not affect the distribution of the other two tasks. A second area of family arrangements is responsibility for household's expenditures. More specifically, this refers to the person (husband, wife, or both) primarily responsible for expenditures in each of six different areas: expenditure on food, expenditure on vacation, payment of municipal taxes, payment of bills, purchase of household goods, and household maintenance expenses. Expenditures in all areas are expected to be managed on a more egalitarian basis in households where the women hold full-time jobs. Last, the topic of money management refers to whether the wife, the husband, or both manage the household money. Respondents were asked

whether the husband administers the family financial resources and relegates the wife a certain share, whether the wife does this, whether they pool their financial resources and have independent access, or whether each takes care of his or her money separately. The authors regard as equal sharing all cases in which the couple pools their resources and both have access to the household's money. It is expected that in households where women are employed full-time, the control of household finances will be more equally shared compared to households in which women are fulltime housewives or hold a part-time job. In all, the authors examine four aspects of housework tasks, six areas of household expenditure, and one indicator of money management. In each of the analyses, we explored whether both the husband and the wife are equally responsible for the specific task. All the analyses thus use a logistic regression technique to estimate the likelihood of egalitarian arrangements. Employment status, the main independent variable, classifies women into one of three categories: housewife, part-time, or full-time worker. In addition to employment status, the models included several control variables that are commonly used in the study of household division of labor. These include husband's labor force status, wife's and husband's education, whether the wife's earnings are equal or more than her husband earnings, the presence of young children at home, and wife's ethnicity. The operational definition of these variables and the descriptive statistics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the sample (n=152 married couples)

| Sr No | Percentage of Respondents | Employed on a full-time basis | Held a part-time job |
|-------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Women in the sample | 45% | 55% |
| | Men in the sample | 80% | 20% |

Table 1 shows that 45% of all women in the sample were employed on a full-time basis and that another 55% held a part-time job. Among the husbands, the majority (80%) was employed full-time.

Table 2 Percentage Distribution of husbands' and part-time employed wives' involvement in household tasks (n=72 married couples)

| Sr No | Household tasks according to 25 items index of husbands' relative involvement in housework | Responses | | | | | |
|-------|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | | Wife Only (%) | Mostly Wife (%) | Alternating (%) | Mostly Husband (%) | Husband Only (%) | Neither (%) |
| 1 | Washing clothes | 40% | 23% | 11% | 3% | 11% | 12% |
| 2 | Cleaning bathroom | 29% | 31% | 15% | 7% | 10% | 8% |
| 3 | Cleaning kitchen | 27% | 36% | 9% | 13% | 13% | 2% |
| 4 | Ironing | 30% | 32% | 10% | 12% | 12% | 4% |
| 5 | Washing dishes | 26% | 33% | 12% | 11% | 10% | 8% |
| 6 | Preparing food | 25% | 27% | 17% | 14% | 16% | 1% |
| 7 | Cleaning rooms | 30% | 34% | 17% | 6% | 4% | 9% |
| 8 | Managing expenses | 13% | 16% | 30% | 25% | 12% | 4% |
| 9 | Buying personal items (e.g., clothing, shoes, perfume) | 13% | 20% | 21% | 16% | 18% | 12% |
| 10 | Shopping for home needs (e.g., food, soap) | 9% | 15% | 21% | 23% | 21% | 11% |
| 11 | Helping with schoolwork | 5% | 7% | 17% | 13% | 7% | 51% |
| 12 | Following up on children's schooling | 11% | 9% | 22% | 16% | 10% | 32% |
| 13 | Buying drinking water | 21% | 15% | 23% | 13% | 20% | 8% |
| 14 | Accompanying someone on an errand | 9% | 15% | 18% | 7% | 18% | 33% |
| 15 | Paying bills | 14% | 17% | 20% | 22% | 21% | 6% |
| 16 | Providing transportation for a family member | 12% | 14% | 27% | 18% | 24% | 5% |

Table 2 (Continued)

| Sr No | Household tasks according to 25 items index of husbands' relative involvement in housework | Responses | | | | | |
|-------|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | | Wife Only (%) | Mostly Wife (%) | Alternating (%) | Mostly Husband (%) | Husband Only (%) | Neither (%) |
| 17 | Providing care for a 4 to 14 year old son or daughter | 19% | 22% | 15% | 20% | 19% | 5% |
| 18 | Buying water for domestic and personal hygiene | 21% | 20% | 15% | 20% | 21% | 3% |
| 19 | Caring for sick family member | 23% | 17% | 45% | 11% | 4% | 0% |
| 20 | Performing house maintenance | 3% | 2% | 15% | 51% | 29% | 0% |
| 21 | Providing care for a 0 to 3 year old son or daughter | 23% | 18% | 22% | 14% | 15% | 8% |
| 22 | Caring for elderly family member | 20% | 23% | 16% | 10% | 15% | 16% |
| 23 | Buying fuel | 16% | 20% | 23% | 19% | 16% | 6% |
| 24 | Caring for disabled family member | 21% | 24% | 31% | 8% | 9% | 7% |
| 25 | Performing car maintenance | 4% | 3% | 13% | 38% | 27% | 15% |
| | Avg | 18.56% | 19.72% | 19.4% | 16.4% | 15.28% | 10.64% |

No significant differences were found in the rate of sharing between housewives and women employed part-time. As expected, women's employment (full-time or part-time) did not affect the likelihood of shared responsibility for shopping and for home repairs. The care for sick family members, however, tends to be equally shared when women have a paid job irrespective of whether employed full-time or part-time. It may be the case that care for sick members is based on the parents' time schedules and their ability to be absent from work more than on their power position. It is worth noting that men's employment

status hardly affects the likelihood to share except for a clear reduction in sharing of laundry when the husband is employed full-time. Equality in the household division of labor is related to education, mostly that of the wife. Although the effect of education is nonlinear, women's academic education increases the amount of sharing in laundry by a factor of 3, independent of her employment status and her husband's education. The same is true for caring for sick family members and for shopping. Women's education thus may serve as an indicator for attitudes toward an egalitarian division of labor more than a bargaining resource. Above and beyond the level of their wives' education, men's education does not play a significant role in affecting the level of sharing in household chores, than men with a lower level of education to share). The presence of preschool children has no effect on the household division of labor, whereas school-age children decrease the level of sharing in caring.

Table 3 Percentage Distribution of husbands' and full-time employed wives' involvement in household tasks (n=80 married couples)

| Sr No | Household tasks according to 25 items index of husbands' relative involvement in housework | Responses | | | | | |
|-------|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | | Wife Only (%) | Mostly Wife (%) | Alternating (%) | Mostly Husband (%) | Husband Only (%) | Neither (%) |
| 1 | Washing clothes | 12% | 23% | 21% | 13% | 21% | 10% |
| 2 | Cleaning bathroom | 15% | 20% | 20% | 16% | 16% | 13% |
| 3 | Cleaning kitchen | 9% | 12% | 16% | 18% | 8% | 37% |
| 4 | Ironing | 12% | 14% | 21% | 17% | 10% | 26% |
| 5 | Washing dishes | 18% | 15% | 10% | 11% | 9% | 37% |
| 6 | Preparing food | 21% | 13% | 8% | 7% | 10% | 41% |
| 7 | Cleaning rooms | 15% | 16% | 19% | 12% | 10% | 28% |
| 8 | Managing expenses | 22% | 19% | 16% | 23% | 18% | 2% |
| 9 | Buying personal items (e.g., clothing, shoes, perfume) | 22% | 17% | 25% | 15% | 16% | 5% |

Table 3 (Continued)

| Sr No | Household tasks according to 25 items index of husbands' relative involvement in housework | Responses | | | | | |
|-------|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | | Wife Only (%) | Mostly Wife (%) | Alternating (%) | Mostly Husband (%) | Husband Only (%) | Neither (%) |
| 10 | Shopping for home needs (e.g., food, soap) | 20% | 21% | 19% | 19% | 12% | 9% |
| 11 | Helping with schoolwork | 14% | 22% | 17% | 15% | 19% | 13% |
| 12 | Following up on children's schooling | 16% | 12% | 24% | 13% | 12% | 23% |
| 13 | Buying drinking water | 11% | 13% | 25% | 17% | 15% | 19% |
| 14 | Accompanying someone on an errand | 24% | 19% | 16% | 20% | 18% | 3% |
| 15 | Paying bills | 21% | 18% | 21% | 22% | 17% | 1% |
| 16 | Providing transportation for a family member | 19% | 16% | 20% | 21% | 23% | 1% |
| 17 | Providing care for a 4 to 14 year old son or daughter | 9% | 12% | 18% | 10% | 15% | 36% |
| 18 | Buying water for domestic and personal hygiene | 19% | 18% | 20% | 19% | 20% | 4% |
| 19 | Caring for sick family member | 23% | 17% | 45% | 11% | 4% | 0% |
| 20 | Performing house maintenance | 3% | 2% | 15% | 51% | 29% | 0% |

Table 3 (Continued)

| Sr No | Household tasks according to 25 items index of husbands' relative involvement in housework | Responses | | | | | |
|-------|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | | Wife Only (%) | Mostly Wife (%) | Alternating (%) | Mostly Husband (%) | Husband Only (%) | Neither (%) |
| 21 | Providing care for a 0 to 3 year old son or daughter | 6% | 13% | 11% | 12% | 12% | 46% |
| 22 | Caring for elderly family member | 5% | 11% | 13% | 13% | 12% | 46% |
| 23 | Buying fuel | 10% | 12% | 27% | 21% | 14% | 16% |
| 24 | Caring for disabled family member | 11% | 15% | 28% | 12% | 9% | 25% |
| 25 | Performing car maintenance | 2% | 6% | 20% | 32% | 26% | 14% |
| | Avg | 14.36% | 15.04% | 19.8% | 17.6% | 15% | 18.2% |

Table 3 presents the results for the division of household tasks of husbands' and full-time employed wives'. The researchers find that women's full-time employment increases the likelihood of sharing in the most undesired female-dominated activity — doing the laundry. Equal sharing is more likely to take place in households where the woman is employed full-time compared to households where the wife is a full-time housewife. The rate of sharing is higher in households where she is employed full-time compared to households where the wife is employed on a part-time basis.

The importance of research on the financial practices of couples has been affirmed in the literature (Eagly, Wood & Schmidt. 2004). Examining patterns of couples' spending, control of resources and decision-making processes in financial matters is important not only to understand households' economic behaviour, but also to serve as a basis for various kinds of interventions for the promotion of family wellbeing. The following table shows the responses of part-time employed husbands and wives on distribution of various indicators of household's financial responsibilities and money management for expenses.

Table 4 Responses of part-time employed husbands and wives on distribution of various indicators of household's financial responsibilities and money management for expenses (n=72 married couples)

| Sr No | Money management for expenses | Responses | | |
|------------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | Woman | Men | Equal |
| 1 | Food | 35% | 45% | 20% |
| 2 | Household goods | 21% | 39% | 40% |
| 3 | Vacations | 20% | 50% | 30% |
| 4 | Maintenance | 26% | 52% | 22% |
| 5 | Municipal taxes | 18% | 58% | 24% |
| Avg | | 24.00% | 48.80% | 27.20% |

According to the data, major household expenditures are mostly made together by both spouses: In 40% of the households, both are responsible for the purchase of household goods and 50% of the husbands decide about their vacations. Men, more than women are responsible for maintenance and municipal taxes. Only 27.20% of the couples manage their money equally. Given the widely diverse features of both the families and the contexts in which they operate, couples' financial decisions are a complex issue which has implications for different spheres of family life. Hence, it has become an object of study for various academic disciplines (Brines. 1994)

Table 5 Responses of full-time employed husbands and wives on distribution of various indicators of household's financial responsibilities and money management for expenses (n=80 married couples)

| Sr No | Money management for expenses | Responses | | |
|------------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | Woman | Men | Equal |
| 1 | Food | 32% | 27% | 41% |
| 2 | Household goods | 29% | 30% | 41% |
| 3 | Vacations | 33% | 29% | 38% |
| 4 | Maintenance | 32% | 37% | 31% |
| 5 | Municipal taxes | 22% | 42% | 36% |
| Avg | | 29.60% | 33.00% | 37.40% |

Generally, from cooking and cleaning, to fetching water and firewood or taking care of children and the elderly, women carry out more unpaid household and care work than men. However, in almost half of all households, men have sole responsibility in this area compared to only 29% of households where full-time employed women are responsible for this task. Men are also more likely to take care of taxes and maintenance bills (37% and 42%). According to the data, 37.40% of the couples manage their money equally.

Results

Equality, equity, and related issues are perhaps taken care of passionately in a family. There is enough evidence of coexistence in family set up. Exceptions may exist, but these exceptions are to be managed exceptionally. In this regard, this research has indeed found that employment outside the home reduces the time spent by women in housework and slightly increases the contribution of husbands. Past studies have focused in large part on the time allocation between housework tasks. Studies that looked at task allocation in the household have found extensive gender segregation according to which women are typically assigned the more time-consuming chores (Aytac & Teachman. 1992). Even when men

increase their participation in familial obligations, they tend to take on tasks that are less time-consuming so that the overall time allocation of men and women remains essentially unchanged. Indeed, recent research on men's attitudes toward gender roles and the household division of labor has indicated that although a growing proportion of men are ready to participate in housework, they are willing to do so only on their own terms; men want to do what is pleasant and easier for them to perform (Presser. 1994).

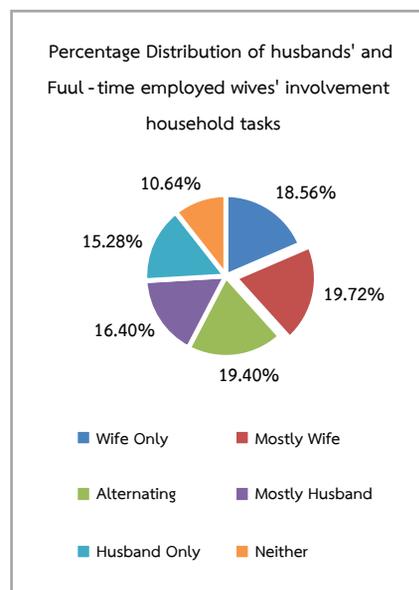


Figure 1 Contrast between percentage distribution of husbands' and part-time employed wives' involvement and husbands' and full-time employment wives' involvement in household tasks

Figure 1 summarizes the contrast between percentage distribution of husbands' and part-time employed wives' involvement and husbands' and full-time employment wives' involvement in household tasks. Most of the household tasks are carried out by mostly wives when they are part-time employed. On the other hand, husbands and wives share the household tasks only when women are full-time employed. It is found that full-time employment contributes to equality in household work and responsibilities.

Gender inequalities in the family have been only partially mitigated by the growing contribution of women to family budgets, resulting from their participation in the labour market. In fact, women tend to earn less than men on average, given the prevalence of a wage gender gap, and tend to be penalized for maternity, which leads them to dedicate less time to their job – in accordance with prevailing gender roles – at a time when expenses increase significantly (Coltrane. 1996). Thus, in order to maintain an equitable distribution of resources within the couple, contrast between responses of part-time and full-time employed husbands and wives on distribution of household's financial responsibilities and money management has been studied.

Figure 2 Contrast between responses of part-time and full-time employed husbands and wives on distribution of household's financial responsibilities and money management for expenses

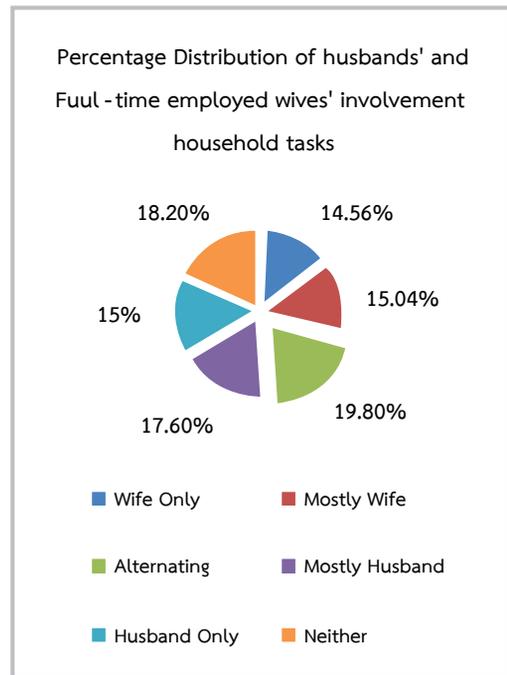
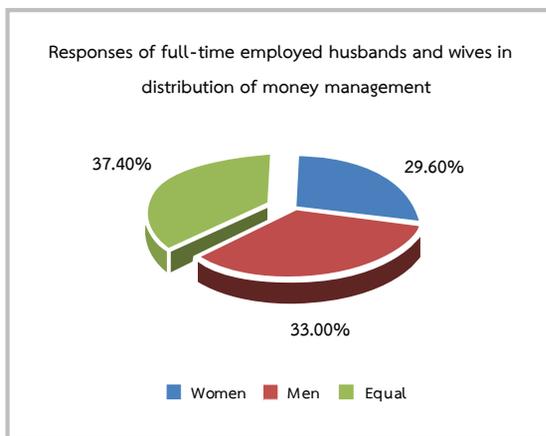
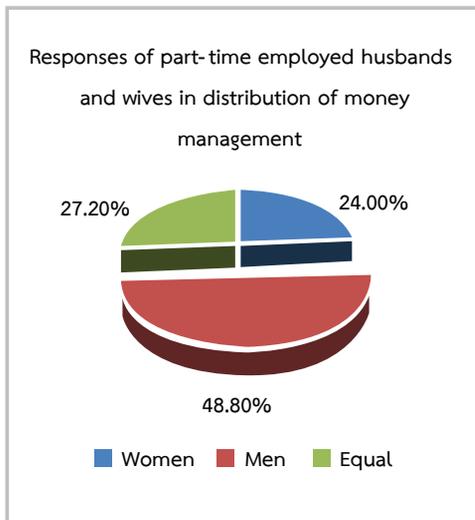


Figure 2 illustrates show the contrast between responses of part-time and full-time employed husbands and wives on distribution of household's financial responsibilities and money management for expenses. Men are more responsible for money management for expenses than women when they are part-time employed. In contrast, husbands and wives manage their money equally when they are full-time employed.



Discussion

We all have unconscious gender biases. These are roles that we've internalized based on our society's set expectations about how men and women should dress, behave and present themselves, and in some cases, what kind of work they should do. It's in our hands to become aware of these biases and challenge the stereotypes on the street or at home. Part-time employment has become a prominent feature of women's labor force participation. It is a form of employment that is preferred by many women and by many

employers because it constitutes a compromise between the demand for women's time and commitment to the family on the one hand and to their market activity on the other hand. The availability of part-time employment contributed to the rising participation of women in the labor force but at the same time also limited their opportunities in the labor market. Past studies on labor market outcomes revealed women's disadvantage in rewards and career prospects. In the current study, the authors have examined the effect of women's employment pattern on their households' arrangements. The researchers demonstrated in their analysis that whereas full-time employment contributes to equality in household work and responsibilities, part-time employment has no different effect than nonmarket work. The analyses show that part-time workers gain no advantage over housewives within their families: The traditional division of household tasks and responsibilities is not altered by their engagement in paid – employment. In terms of hours of work, they have a higher workload than housewives and less cooperation than full-time working wives. Paradoxically, their second-shift effort does not improve their standing within the family in terms of access to the household's resources and decision making. It is clear that part-time employment is not just reduced-time employment but rather is qualitatively different from full-time involvement in market activity.

These findings combined with prior research lead to the conclusion that part-time workers suffer from a double disadvantage: namely, in the labor market as well as in the family. Their economic activity is devalued, they are not perceived as committed workers, and they are largely invisible in prime labor market positions. The work of women who are employed part-time is also invisible in the household. They gain no legitimate ground to demand of other household members increased participation in housework. Furthermore, women's part-time-work does not necessarily lead to greater participation in household decision making. From this point of view, their participation in the labor market is unrewarded. Whereas their full-time counterparts have visible gains both in the market and in the family, women who work part-time do not differ from women who do not participate in paid employment.

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