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# UNDERGRADUATE'S HISTORY OF SEXUAL ABUSE, PARENTING STYLE AND SEXUAL RISK BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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## Abstract

*This study examined the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among undergraduate students in southwestern Nigeria. Also investigated the association between perceived parenting styles of undergraduate students and risky sexual behaviour as well as their sexual abuse history with the aim of understanding how to resolve the problem associated with it. The study adopted descriptive survey with a sample of 2,300 undergraduate students selected from six universities in south-western Nigeria. 'Questionnaire on Sexual Abuse and Risky Sexual Behaviour' (QSARSB) and 'Perceived Parenting Authority Questionnaire' (PPAQ), were used to collect data for the study.*

*Results of the study indicated the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among undergraduate students (60.9%), and that sexual abuse had significant relationship with risky sexual behaviour ( $\chi^2=409.9 <0.05$ ). Also there was a significant relationship between parenting styles and risky sexual behaviour ( $\chi^2=413, 27 <0.05$ ). However, family type had no significant influence on risky sexual practices ( $\chi^2=3.62 >0.05$ ,  $\chi^2= 3.47 >0.05$ ).*

*It was concluded that university undergraduate students in southwestern Nigeria in engaged in risky sexual behaviour which was a function of factors like poor parenting styles and history of sexual abuse. These factors are necessary for consideration in providing intervention programme for resolving this problem.*

## Introduction

In recent times, the concept of parenting has become very relevant in the study of adolescents behaviour. Researchers have provided convincing evidence that parenting behaviour during adolescence period is an important determinant of offspring behaviour, Green (1995) stated that the family is the first setting that is capable of affecting children's ability to function effectively in the society and even the coping strategies they adopt in

relationship emerge from their interaction with their parent. The effects of the quality of the dyadic mother-child-and-father-child experience are obviously manifested in the way the children perceived their parents role of childcare.

Conceptually, parenting goes beyond being paternal or maternal progenitor but a representation of role modeling in upbringing of the children. It is basically the ability to look after children which involves the rearing of a child or children especially the care, love and guidance given by a parent. In this sense children are monitored and supervised by parent as they grow up.

Further more many researchers have investigated the association between adolescents' sexual behaviour and family variable like parenting for example parent child connectedness or closeness is related to both daughters' and sons postponement of sexual intercourse (Jarcad, Dittus, & Gordon 1996; Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones ,Tarbor Benbring, Sieving, Shew, Ireland, Bearinger & Udm 1997; Upchurch, Aneshensel, Sucoff & Levy-Storms, (1999). These studies and others that may exist in literature provide the ground to see parenting as a variable that exerts influence on adolescent's sexual behavior. Related to as part of family process, parenting provides a salient developmental context, in that children grow up with one or two biological parents who have significant parental interactions and disciplinary orientation on the way the adolescents should relate to others. Most importantly parenting is a process with many dimensions which have consequences on the adolescent's behaviour. The studies of Miller, Benson & Galbraith (2001), Gray & Steinberg, (1999) and Dorius & Barber (1998), revealed that intrusive maternal control is related to early age of first sexual intercourse which is part of risky behaviour. But with these reports, one is not really sure of the association that exists between each of the various dimensions of parenting or orientation regarded as the preventing

styles. It is important to research into these dimensions so as to ascertain which of these dimensions positively or negatively correlate with risky sexual behaviour.

The research by Baumrind (1968, 1979, and 1991) delineated major pattern of parental behaviour using personal observation and standardized ratings. He described the major patterns of behaviour as authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and rejecting-neglecting. These four parenting styles were based on two important dimensions of parenting as described by Baumrind which are demandingness and responsiveness. She described demandingness to mean the claims parents made on adolescents to become integrated into the family whole by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys. Responsiveness according to her is the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self regulation and self assertion by being attuned, supportive and acquiescent to the children's special needs and demand. Although research in the relationship between parenting style and adolescent risky sexual behaviour is limited but the work of Baumrind (1991) is suggestive of possibility of a linkage between the two. In her study on how parents' styles are related to the ability of adolescents to achieve independence and self-regulation, Baumrind (1991) established a relationship between these parenting styles and the adolescents' self-regulation.

Indeed parent's involvement in the socialization process of adolescent in the family is vital to the psychological and social growth of the adolescents. Several important conceptual and methodological issues may complicate one's understanding of the association between the parents or family process on sexual behaviour of adolescent. For example the issue of parental control is multidimensional, prior parents' child sexual communication and variations in family rules and household routines. Thus results across studies are so variable and discrepant that no simple, direct association is discernable (Gray & Steinberg 1999 and Dorius & Barber 1998).

According to Okpako (2004) a cordial relationship between adolescents and parents could foster training and acceptability of the norms. He posited that adolescents are learners trying to establish their independence and that any lapses in this vital life act may have adverse consequences. He continued that such children may be at risk. Collier (1997) observed that adolescents appear to thrive developmentally when their family setting is one of warm relationship. He reported that adolescents at risk are those who fall into one or more of five problematic categories such as low school achievements, drop outs, gay and lesbian, single teenage mother, and so on. He concluded that these result, from poor parenting.

Many adults have difficulty in acknowledging adolescents as sexual being and therefore see adolescents' sexuality as something that must be controlled and restrained. Whereas adolescents nature or characteristics of sexual behaviour are very obvious in their heterosexual relationship. Due to the biological or physiological changes in the adolescence period as characterized by hormonal changes, it is natural for adolescents to become curious about making choices around sexual activities. Thus the adolescents, (as commonly reported in literature) engage in various kinds of sexual behaviour like sexual intercourse dating, masturbation oral sex anal sex homosexuality and many other sexual activities. It has been controversially represented that there is a limited amount of scientific data on adolescent sexual behaviour as a result of adults 'fear' that asking young people about sex is tantamount to giving them ideas and encouragement to engage in sexual debut (Grambulaxum 2002). But in the contrary in many African nations, data is accumulating that youth are getting much involved in sexual activity than before. Djamba (2004) reported that there is a declining age of first sexual debut, increasing number of sexually active adolescents and high-risk sexual behaviour among adolescents. Fortunately, in recent years researchers have brought unusual focus on the age at which adolescents boys and girls initiate sexual activity. The

characteristics and numbers of sexual partners and the use of condom for disease prevention are equally of importance to them today.

Moronkola (1995) opined that the adolescence period is a period that is critical in human sexuality because it involves the shaping of one's knowledge, attitude and sexual practices. From the studies of Adebayo (1996) and Freedman (2000) it was shown that adolescent sexuality is the most exciting part of life. However if this period is not properly governed it could lead to the aberration of socially acceptable sexual practice. The study of Freedman (2002) has shown a high level of sexual activities among Nigerian adolescents. Many of these activities include having more than one sex partners, patronage of prostitutes and masturbation when they lack access to opposite sex. But Charles & Orji (1998) in the past the adolescents in the less sophisticated African Society display their sexuality by engaging in many culturally acceptable methods without necessarily involving in sexual intercourses. The methods they used according to them include: boy bullying the girls, twisting their arms, snatching their scarves while the girls delight in screaming, pretentious cursing beating the boys on the back and attempting to run away.

It appears that the contemporary adolescent are more sophisticated than this based on current findings especially in the urban and civilized world. To so many adolescents today sexuality connotes exploration and fulfillment of their uncontrollable sexual drives. In what seems like the collation of studies and surveys that looked at how adolescents feel about sexuality, how they make sexual decisions, how they view relationships and what they know about sexuality, Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance (2001) reported that 60.5 percent of the population studied indicated have had sexual intercourses. About 33.4 percent are currently sexually active (i.e. has had sexual intercourse in the three months preceding the study). 6.6 percent of this group reported initiating sexual intercourse before age 13. Also 14.2 percent of the students reported having had sexual intercourse with four or more partner in the year

(2001) the survey also reported that 22 percent of sexually active adolescents under study reported they had 'ever' had unprotected sex (not used a condom). The studies however added to their reports that adolescents who were close to their mother delay in sexual intercourse. These reports may be indicative of parents (or mother) influences of the attitude of adolescents to sexual activity. The discussion on why adolescents engage in risky sexual behaviour may become clearer if this connectedness of the parent's mode of relationship is explored.

Risky sexual behaviour involves unprotected intercourse (intercourse without barrier such as condoms), unprotected mouth to genital contact, early sexual activity (before age 14), multiple sex partner, high-risk partner (partner who has multiple sex partners or uses drugs) and prostitution. Researchers have reported that youth and adolescents are engaging in these kinds of sexual practices. For instance, Varga (2000) reported that many African youths and adolescents are at increased risk of HIV infection and transmission due to risky sexual practice. She further stated that such behaviour patterns include early initiation of intercourse, low contraceptive use rates, multiple sex partners and poor sexual negotiation skills. This profile is true for Nigerian youth according to Nicholis, Ladipo, Patman and Otolorin (1986). Adolescents engage in risky sexual behaviour partly due to erroneous belief and perception of sexual activity. According to Araoye (1996) some adolescents indulge in risky sexual behaviour, thinking that it is normal and thus urination after sexual intercourse will get rid of any infection that might have been transmitted. Also Okanlawon (2004) opined that gender power imbalance, lack of assertive communication and negotiations limited parental and family support for chastity hinder adolescents to engage in safer sexual relations.

Studies have revealed that sexually active adolescents are inconsistent in condom use which they say it reduces the sensation and interferes with sexual spontaneity (Varga 2000 Omoteso 2002 and Okanlawon 2004). Apart from this, for many African youth obstacles

related to both condom availability and acceptability hamper practicing of safer sex. There is also the misconception among the youth that condom use is synonymous with promiscuity and infidelity (Varga 1999). It has been suggested that the determinants of African youths' condom use entail exploring the relationship between condom use and factors such as gender dynamics, stereotypes concerning appropriate sexual comportment, financial and material constraints, and the lack of skills to challenge scripted sexual dynamics and partner expectation, and self perceived risk of pregnancy or HIV infection (Varga 1999).

Apart from this risky sexual behaviour is in the increase among Nigerian undergraduates especially in the eastern parts of the country. In a study conducted by Okafor & Obi (2005) among undergraduate students in Enugu, Nigeria indicated that the prevalence of sexual activity was 76.8% with 85.4% of the females and 62.3% of the males having more than one sexual partner. Not only this, the females (65.7%) had their first sexual intercourse as an adolescent as against 42.2% of the male counterparts. The study further indicated that risky sexual behaviours were very common among the lower social class, adolescent females and those living off campus. It was acknowledged by the study that the students were aware of the complications that could follow such risky sexual behaviour, yet they remained unchanged. These findings suggest that providing information about the implication of risky sexual behaviour may not be enough to reduce the occurrence of these behaviours and this provides reasons to research into other factors that might have accompanied developmental process of individuals especially on sexual behaviour. Such factors may include the family values on sexual conducts, parental control and psychological effect of initial sexual experiences in early life. For instance, in the study under review, it was revealed that among the male participants, risky sexual behaviour was favoured by the urge to have sex and curiosity. Parenting style that provides no skill for this kind of situation may encourage lack

of self-regulation and least competence in managing such urges. But this is just a mere speculation; it will be reliable if this is empirically established as intended by this study.

In a more recent study carried out by Abimbola (2007), a total of 303 adolescents and youths attending STDs clinic in Ile-Ife were studied, 217 (72%) were students and 85% of the studied population practiced risky sexual behaviour. This prevalence though may not be descriptive enough because not all of them were students and even those who were students were not categorized to actually determine what they represent. A study of a larger population focused on students (undergraduates) may be needed and to be specific in understanding if there are peculiarities and factors associated with this group (undergraduates) as regards risky sexual behaviour. This is important because it may serve the basis for an intervention programme.

Considering the various preventive efforts made by various organizations and bodies to fight HIV/AIDS, it has been confirmed that African youth and adolescents are at increasing risk of HIV infection and transmission due to risky sexual practices (Varga 2000). Such behaviour patterns include early initiation of intercourse, low contraceptive use rates, multiple sex partners, and poor sexual negotiation skills. The global trend shows that the HIV and AIDS pandemic worldwide has hit young people the hardest. Despite efforts being made by various organizations (especially WHO, UNAIDS and others) to curb the spread, the infection rate continues to rise. It therefore becomes logical to think or suspect that something else which these organizations have not identified could be responsible for the disposition of such behaviour leading to these sexual hazards. That is why the guesses of this study are predicated on the assumption that ineffective parenting might contribute to inappropriate sexual behaviour or that effective parenting might result into appropriate sexual behaviour

It is important to note that the past of an individual may be relevant to his/her present or future emotional responsiveness or dispositions. Psychologists agreed that when an

unfavourable environmental condition interferes negatively with one's psychological development, it may lead to maladjustment. Basically unpleasant or traumatic experiences are not easily forgotten and may form the basis for subsequent reactions. The long-term effect created may become organic in one's behaviour. Incidents like sexual abuse are usually unpleasant to the victim and subsequently result in maladjusted sexual behaviour. For example Finkelhor and Browne (1985) proposed a model that describes how children who have experienced Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) learn inappropriate sexual behaviour. Their model can be explained in terms of four factors; traumatic sexualization, betrayal, stigmatization and powerlessness. They concluded that children who are given a variety of incentives such as affection, attention and gifts in return for sex develop distorted sexual morals. They also learn to associate sexuality with shame and guilt because of messages about the sexual behaviour from the abusers or others who learned about the abuse. These processes interrupt normal sexual development and lead to inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Following this, researchers in the western world have explored the link between histories of sexual abuse with high risk sexual behaviour among adolescents. For instance findings from the 1997 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance, Survey of 81600 Adolescents (831 sexually experienced boys and 7799 sexually experienced girls) indicated that 9.3% of the boys and 30.2% of the girls disclosed a sexual contact against their will. Also Rejsilvern and Amano (2000) found that sexually abused girls were significantly more likely than those without such a history to report early sexual activity, multiple partners and to have been pregnant. Another study by Brown, Lowrde. Zontnick and Chon (2000) indicated that those with a history of sexual abuse were three times more likely than their peers to report inconsistent condom use. They demonstrated significantly less condom self-efficacy, less knowledge of HIV, less impulse control, less frequent purchase and use of condoms and significantly higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

From the foregoing, it seems obvious that in the literature, there is a link between sexual abuse and risky sexual behaviour. But it is not enough to generalize by way of extension since researches in this area are limited in quantity. Also, since the perception of sexual abuse in the African culture is quite different from that of the western world in which most of the reported studies were carried out, it might be necessary to examine this area of study. Equally sometimes; cases of sexual abuse may go unnoticed thereby reducing the focus on its linkage with maladjusted sexual behaviour. This premise provides justification for its inclusion in this study. It is important to state that knowledge of factors responsible for risky sexual practices in Africa setting is relevant to controlling it This will enable the development of counseling intervention based on factors that are associated with it. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to ascertain the influence of parenting style and sexual abuse on risky sexual behaviour of undergraduate students. The study also seeks to investigate the relationship between parenting style of students and risky sexual behaviour. Specifically the study is designed to

1. ascertain the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among undergraduates
2. examine the relationship between parenting style and risky sexual behaviour
3. investigate the relationship between history of sexual abuse and risky sexual behaviour
4. find out if there is any relationship between the students family type and risky sexual behaviour

In other to proffer solutions to the concern of this study, the following research question and hypotheses are raised.

#### Research Questions

- (1) What is the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among university undergraduate students?

## Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between parenting styles and risky sexual behaviour of students.
2. There is no significant relationship between history of sexual abuse and risky sexual behaviour.

## Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The study relied on the retrospective self-report of the respondents. This is because retrospective studies are common sources of information about the prevalence of sexual contact between people.

The population for this study was undergraduates in all the universities in Southwestern Nigeria .Three universities were selected by simple random sampling. The sample consisted of 1,050 undergraduates selected by purpose based on faculties in the selected universities.

Two research instruments were used to collect data. The first titled ‘Questionnaire on Sexual Abuse and Risky Sexual Behaviour’ (QSARSB.)The second instrument titled ‘Perceived Parental Authority Questionnaire’ (PPAQ) which was adapted from Buri(1991)Parental Authority Questionnaire. The reliability of both instruments was ascertained to be 0.76 and 0.78 respectively. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and chi-square analysis.

## Results

The results are presented in the order of the research questions and hypotheses raised.

### Research Question 1

What is the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among university undergraduate students?

To answer this question, the responses of the sample selected for this study were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency counts. The summary is presented in Table

**Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Prevalence of Risky Sexual Behaviour among Students**

	<b>RISKY</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NO RISK</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NOT SPECIFIED</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	661	66.1	320	32.0	19	1.9
Female	731	57.7	513	40.5	22	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1392</b>		<b>833</b>		<b>41</b>	

Table 1 reveals the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among undergraduate students. Out of two thousand, two hundred and twenty five (2,225), one thousand three hundred and ninety two (1,392) indicated that they engaged in risky sexual behaviour this represents 60.9%. Also eight hundred and thirty-three of the sample indicated non-involvement in risky sexual practices. This also represents 36.4% of the total sample for the study. Forty one (41) which represents 1.8% of the total sample did not specify whether they engage in risky sexual behaviour or not. Further descriptive analysis on the basis of family type is presented on Table 2

**Table 2: Prevalence According to Family Type**

<b>FAMILY TYPE</b>	<b>RISKY</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NO RISK</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NOT SPECIFIED</b>	<b>%</b>
Monogamy	984	60.9%	615	38.1%	16	1.0
Polygamy	382	63.6%	205	34.1%	14	2.3%
Others	5	26.3%	6	31.6%	8	42.1%
Not Specified	27	52.7%	18	35.3%	6	11.8%

Table 4 represents the respondents across family types 984 (60.9%) of the respondents from monogamous family type showed that they engaged in risky sexual behaviour while 615

(38.1%) of them did not engage in risky sexual practices and 16 (1.0%) did not specify whether they engage in it or not. Respondents in polygamous family type showed that 382 (93.6%) engaged in risky sexual practices while 205 (34.1%) indicated no risky sexual practices and 14 (2.3%) did not specify where they belong. Other types (though not specified) presented 5 (26.3%) as being involved in risky sexual practices while 6 (31.6%) showed no risky sexual practices and 8 (42.1%) did not indicate their status.

27 (52.7%) who engaged in risky sexual behaviour did not specify their family type including 18 (35.3%) who showed no risky sexual practices and 6 (11.8%) who were neither risky or not in sexual behaviour.

### Hypothesis One

This hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between students with history of sexual abuse and risky sexual behaviour. To test this hypothesis data collected on students risky sexual behaviour and history of sexual abuse were subjected to chi-square analysis. The results are presented in table 8.

**Table 3: History of Sexual Abuse and Students Risky Sexual Behaviour**

SEXUAL ABUSE HISTORY		STUDENTS' RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR	$\chi^2$	Df	P
	Risky	No Risk			
Abused	1057 (829.4)	269 (496.6)	409.99	1	<.05
Not Abused	341(568.6)	568 (340.4)			

From Table 8, the chi-square value of relationship between students who have been abused and risky sexual behaviour is 409.99 which is significant at 0.05 level ( $\chi^2 = 409.99$ , df 1,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that there is a significant relationship between students' history of sexual abuse and risky sexual behaviour.

## Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis 2 states that there is no significant relationship between perceived parenting styles and risky sexual behaviour of undergraduate students.

To determine this, the data collected were subjected to Chi-square analysis and the results are presented in Table 9.

**Table 4: Students’ Perceived Parenting Styles and Students’ Risky Sexual Behaviour**

STUDENTS’ PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLES	STUDENTS’ RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR		$\chi^2$	Df	P
	Risky	No Risk			
Permissive	101(199.3)	218 (119.7)	413.27	3	<.05
Authoritative	178 (279.9)	270 (168.1)			
Authoritarian	133 (156.2)	117 (93.8)			
Neglecting-Rejecting	978 (754.7)	230 (453.3)			

From Table 9, the Chi-Square value of relationship between the perceived parenting styles and risky sexual behaviour is 413.27. This is significant at 0.05 level ( $\chi^2 = 413.27$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that there is a significant relationship between risky sexual behaviour and parenting styles. Thus this hypothesis is rejected.

## Discussion

The analysis of data collected on the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among undergraduate students showed that 1,398 (61.2%) of the sample used for the study engaged in risky sexual practices. This percentage is unexpected considering the various efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations in their campaign on safer sex and awareness among youths especially in tertiary institutions. The figure is high and follow the trend reported by Okafor & Obi (2005) that dispute a good knowledge of the complications

that could follow risky sexual behaviour, male and female students still engage in it. Also, the finding of this study seems to reflect the findings of Okonkwo, Fatusi & Uuka (2005) which reported that young people between the age of 18-25 engaged in premarital sex and reported that high risk sexual behaviour are prevalent among them. In this present study, it was discovered that those within the group of 21-25 showed similar behaviour 758 (65%) of people in this group engaged in risky sexual behaviour. This may be as a result of the self-belief of independence and presumed freedom enjoyed as young adult who feel they are responsible for their personal decision about sex coupled with peer pressure on sexual engagement. The later assumption was attested to by the study of Okonkwo et al. (2005).

The prevalence across family types showed that 984 (60.9%) of students from monogamy family engaged in risky sexual behaviour and 382 (63.6%) of students from polygamous family also engaged in risky sexual behaviour. This result did not indicate any significant influence on risky sexual behaviour. It is possible that other factors related to family type which was not specified in this study like family structure such as single parenting, divorced and some other features within the family may account for the possible difference. Those family structures and dynamics have been found to influence risky sexual behaviour of adolescents (Muari & Blum, 2005).

Other feelings in this study include parent providing information on sex to their wards, this is regarded as part of family functioning, however, the study showed that a vary low percentage of parents provide information on sex to their children regardless of the family types. This might have contributed to the high prevalence of risky sexual practices across the family types. This is supported by the findings of Nwakue et al. (2001).

Another important finding of this study is that there is a significant relationship between parenting styles and risky sexual behaviour of undergraduate students. This is not unexpected

because in the literature it has been found that parents' involvement or communication tend to influence sexual behaviour (Blum, 2002; Okpako, 2004).

However, the different dimension or pattern or parenting styles showed something interesting to note. Those who perceived their parents to be neglecting-rejecting engaged in risky sexual practices than those in other styles. This may be because they lacked parental involvement or control in taking decision. The style of parenting is characterized as 'disengaged', which provides ground for the adolescents to be loose in their behavioural dispositions (sexual behaviour inclusive). Adolescents will postpone sexual intercourse by their parents' influence (Blum, 2002). But in the case of those reported in this study, their parents are not there for them thus accounted for their lack of self-regulation and competency in sexual relationship. This submission is similar to the finding of Bamurmd (1991).

It is surprising that family type did not significantly influence risky sexual behaviour in this study. One would expect that family type like monogamy or polygamy should have influence on risky sexual behaviour of students raised with these structures. This may be that these two groups are not distinctive enough to bring out features capable of providing influence on risky sexual behaviour. There are other factors residence within the proximal family that are capable of confounding these variables. It is already known in the literature that single parenting, divorced, family culture and so on. These factors have been distinctively identified within these two major family types perhaps the results could have been different (Davis & Friel, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

It was therefore concluded that university undergraduate students in southwestern Nigeria engage in risky sexual practices which was a function of factors like poor parenting

styles, history of sexual abuse, age, sex and academic level of study. These factors are necessary for consideration in providing intervention programme for resolving this problem.

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