

# Domestic Violence During Pregnancy and Affecting Factors

## Gebelikte Aile İçi Şiddet ve Etkileyen Faktörler

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Domestic violence during pregnancy is a major public health problem in all countries. The aim of this study is to investigate domestic violence and factors affecting pregnancy.

**Method:** This cross-sectional descriptive study included 747 pregnant women who presented to an outpatient clinic at a maternity hospital in a city in southeastern Türkiye between December 15, 2014 and January 15, 2015. To collect the data, the researchers developed a 25-item questionnaire based on the literature. In the statistical analysis, percentages, means, standard deviations, and chi-square analysis were used, and a value of  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant.

**Results:** The mean age of the participants was  $26.43 \pm 5.4$ . Of these participants, 7.2% of them reported being physically, emotionally, financially, or sexually abused by their spouse during their marriage, and 2.8% reported being exposed to violence during their current pregnancy. It was found that there was a strong relationship between violence during pregnancy and at the time when the woman wanted to get pregnant, the husband's involvement in violence, the number of pregnancies, and the history of violence from the husband's family. To stop violence, families should get training, counseling, family therapy, and help to learn communication.

**Conclusion:** Violence during pregnancy can be caused by a number of factors, such as being exposed to violence during pregnancy, not wanting to get pregnant, the husband's involvement in violence, the number of pregnancies, and the history of violence from the husband's family.

**Keywords:** Pregnancy, family, domestic violence, women

### Öz

**Giriş:** Gebelikte aile içi şiddet tüm toplumlar için önemli bir halk sağlığı sorunudur. Bu çalışmanın amacı aile içi şiddeti incelemek ve gebeliği etkileyen faktörleri belirlemektir.

**Yöntem:** Kesitsel tanımlayıcı nitelikteki bu araştırmanın evrenini, Türkiye'nin güneydoğusundaki bir ilde 15 Aralık 2014-15 Ocak 2015 tarihleri arasında bir kadın doğum hastanesi ayaktan takip polikliniğine başvuran 747 hamile kadın oluşturdu. Veri toplamak için araştırmacılar tarafından literatüre dayalı olarak hazırlanan 25 sorudan oluşan bir anket kullanılmıştır. İstatistiksel analizde yüzdeler, ortalamalar, standart sapmalar ve ki-kare analizi kullanıldı ve  $p < 0,05$  anlamlı kabul edildi.

**Bulgular:** Araştırmaya katılanların yaş ortalaması  $26.43 \pm 5.4$ 'tür. Gebelerin %7,2'si evlilikleri sırasında eşinden fiziksel, duygusal, ekonomik veya cinsel şiddete maruz kaldığını, bununla birlikte gebelerin %2,8'i ise şu anki gebeliklerinde şiddete maruz kaldığını bildirmiştir. Mevcut gebelikleri sırasında ve gebeliği istedikleri zamanda şiddete maruz kalma, eşinin şiddete karışması, gebelik sayısı ve geçmişte eşinin ailesinden şiddet görmüş olması arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur.

**Sonuç:** Şiddeti önlemek için aile eğitimi, danışmanlık hizmetleri, aile terapileri ve iletişim becerileri eğitimi verilmelidir. Gebelikte şiddete maruz kalmayı etkileyen faktörler arasında gebelikte şiddete maruz kalmak, gebeliği istememek, kocanın şiddete karışması, gebelik sayısı ve eşinin ailesi tarafından geçmişte şiddete maruz kalması sayılabilir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Gebelik, aile, aile içi şiddet, kadınlar

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## INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a complex, global public health problem and a violation of human rights <sup>(1)</sup>. It can also hurt the health and quality of life of women in many ways. Studies on domestic violence show that women who have been beaten or hurt in different ways are more likely to have serious injuries, chronic pain, problems with their digestive system, sexually transmitted diseases, gynecological problems, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Domestic violence during pregnancy is a big problem for everyone's health <sup>(2,3)</sup>.

One of the most dangerous times in a woman's life is when she is pregnant. This risk goes up when pregnant women are hurt. Different kinds of violence against women can happen for many different reasons <sup>(4,5)</sup>. According to the results of many studies, women are more likely to be violently treated, especially when they are pregnant <sup>(6)</sup>. Violence against pregnant women is common in many parts of the world. This is a big problem that hurts the health of both the mother and the baby <sup>(3,7)</sup>. WHO found that more than 90% of pregnant women who were abused were hurt by the father of the baby they were carrying (WHO; 2005). In a study of 19 countries, the number of women who were beaten by their husband or other close partner while they were pregnant ranged from 2% to 13% <sup>(8)</sup>. Domestic violence is more likely to happen to pregnant women in underdeveloped countries (27.7%) than in developed countries (13.3%) <sup>(9)</sup>. In a study of six European countries, the rate of violence against pregnant women was the same in Sweden, Belgium, and Iceland: 3%. In Denmark, Norway, and Estonia, the rates were 3.3%, 3.7%, and 6.5%, respectively <sup>(10)</sup>.

The health of the fetus and the mother after birth depend on the general health and well-being of the mother <sup>(11)</sup>. Studies have shown that there are a number of bad effects, such as more fetal injuries, perinatal death (prenatal death and early neonatal death), premature birth, low birth weight, miscarriage, premature rupture of membranes, urethral rupture, bleeding, prenatal hospitalization, and infection. Domestic violence during pregnancy has many bad effects on the health of the mother, such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide or an attempt at suicide, delayed prenatal care, poor nutrition, and smoking and drinking <sup>(12-15)</sup>. If a woman is exposed to domestic violence while she is pregnant, she is almost 1.5

times more likely to have a baby who is born early or has a low birth weight than women who are not exposed to such violence <sup>(16)</sup>.

The fact that pregnant women don't tell anyone about the violence they face and don't look for help makes it hard to do scientific research on the different aspects of the problem. This makes it hard for health professionals to figure out what kind of violence pregnant women face and help them <sup>(5)</sup>. So, this study was done to look at domestic violence during pregnancy and try to figure out what causes it.

## METHOD

This cross-sectional descriptive study looked at pregnant women who went to an outpatient monitoring clinic at a maternity hospital in a city in southeastern Turkey between December 15, 2014 and January 15, 2015. There were a total of 747 women who agreed to take part in the study. The research data were gathered through direct observation and a 25-item questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to find out about the participants' gender, age, marital status, level of education, income, etc., as well as their fertility, whether they had been violently treated during their marriage or this pregnancy, what kind of violence they had been exposed to, how they reacted to it, and how they dealt with it.

Before the study began, informed consent forms and permission from the Mardin Maternity Hospital's Ethics Committee (dated December 8, 2014) and the Mardin Artuklu University's Ethics Committee (number 2014/04-1) were given to each participant. The statistical analysis of the data used percentages, means, standard deviations, and chi-square analysis.  $P < 0.05$  was thought to be important.

## RESULTS

The average age of the participants in the study was  $26.43 \pm 5.43$  years (Min: 15, Max: 42). The distribution of pregnant women according to some demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1. The pregnant women included in the study stated that on average they had 1-2 children living (61.4%). While 21.3% of women and 5.2% of their husbands were found to be "illiterate", only 10.6% of the women and 8.4% of their husbands were found to be "literate". 94.9% are homemakers and 90.0% of their husbands are employed. 72.3% live in slums. 71.4%

**Table 1. The Distribution of Pregnant Women According to Demographic Characteristics (n= 747)**

	<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age Groups</b>	18 and under	44	5.9
	18-24	278	37.2
	25-29	226	30.3
	30-34	134	17.9
	35 and over	65	8.7
<b>Educational Status</b>	Illiterate	159	21.3
	Literate	79	10.6
	Primary/Secondary School	225	30.1
	High School	152	20.3
	College/University	83	11.1
<b>Family Type</b>	Nuclear	552	73.9
	Extended	195	26.1
<b>Profession</b>	Civil Servant	30	4.0
	Worker	5	0.7
	Farmer	3	0.4
	Housewife	709	94.9
<b>Residence</b>	Village	234	31.3
	Town	211	28.2
	City	302	40.4
<b>House Type</b>	Flat	207	27.7
	Slum	540	72.3
<b>Income Level</b>	Below Minimum Wage	50	6.7
	Minimum Wage	533	71.4
	Above Minimum Wage	164	22.0
<b>Marriage Type</b>	Voluntary/ Out of Love	214	28.6
	Prearranged	533	71.4
<b>Educational Status of the Husband</b>	Illiterate	39	5.2
	Literate	63	8.4
	Primary/Secondary School	223	29.9
	High School	177	23.7
	College/University	150	20.1
<b>Husband's Employment Status</b>	Working	672	90.0
	Not working	75	10.0
	Smoking	474	63.5
<b>Husband's Habits</b>	Alcohol	6	0.8
	No bad habits	267	35.7
<b>Marriage Duration</b>	1-5 years	429	57.4
	6-10 years	190	25.4
	11-15 years	76	10.2
	16-20 years	45	6.0
	Over 20 years	7	0.9
<b>Number of Pregnancies</b>	1-2	386	51.7
	3-4	224	30.0
	4 and more	137	18.3
<b>Status of Pregnancy</b>	Desired	45	6.0
	Undesired	702	94.0
<b>Number of Living Children</b>	1-2	315	61.4
	3-4	148	28.8
	More than 4	50	9.7

reported that they earn a living on the minimum wage and were married by arrangement. However, 94.0% stated that they got pregnant willingly. 35.7% of them stated that their husband did not have any bad habits.

The distribution of types of violence experienced by the pregnant women included in the study are shown in Table 2. The pregnant women reported that 3.7% of their spouses were involved in violence and 3.6% of them were subjected to violence from their families in the past. 7.2% of them also stated that they experienced physical, emotional, economic or sexual violence from their husbands during their marriage while 2.8% of them stated that they experienced violence during their current pregnancy. Shouting (79.1%) and scolding (52.2%) are the most common forms of violence among the pregnant women.

The causes of violence and the distribution of reactions to violence based on the reports of the pregnant women included in the study are presented in Table 3. The pregnant women subjected to violence considered their husbands' immediate anger (49.3%), the influence of others (32.8%), financial difficulties (38.8%), cultural differences (3.0%), jealousy (22.4%), and psychological problems (9.0%) as reasons for being exposed to violence. On the other hand, they also stated that they preferred weeping (59.7%), yelling (35.8%), arguing back (32.8%), withdrawing from social life (53.7%) and seeking help from others (4.5%) as a reaction to the violence. None of the women subjected to violence chose to call the police. The pregnant women listed the reasons for not reacting to the violence as follows: forbearance and optimism (49.3%), accepting the case as one's fate (16.4%), possible divorce (10.4%), having nowhere to go and live (11.9%), tolerating for the sake of children (50.7%), fear (22.4%) and respect (26.9%).

Table 4 shows the percentage of pregnant women in the study who reported experiencing domestic violence during their marriage or current pregnancy, broken down by various demographic factors. The type of family the couple comes from, whether or not the husband has ever been a victim of domestic violence, whether or not the husband is violent, whether or not the couple wants to have children, and where the couple lives all play a role. There is also a strong correlation between the number of pregnancies the couple has had and the frequency

**Table 2. The Distribution of Types of Violence Experienced by the Pregnant Women Included in the Study (n= 747)**

		n	%
Husband's involvement in violence	Yes	28	3.7
	No	719	96.3
Being subjected to violence by her husband's family in the past	Yes	27	3.6
	No	600	80.3
	Unknown	120	16.1
Being subjected to violence during marriage	Yes	54	7.2
	No	693	92.8
	Yes	21	2.8
	No	726	97.2
<b>Types of violent actions</b>			
Slapping	Yes	17	25.4
	No	50	74.6
Kicking	Yes	4	6.0
	No	63	94.0
Attempting to suffocate	Yes	1	1.5
	No	66	98.5
Biting	Yes	2	3.0
	No	65	97.0
Attacking with a knife / Hurting	Yes	1	1.5
	No	66	98.5
Torturing	Yes	2	3.0
	No	65	97.0
Unwanted impregnation	Yes	2	3.0
	No	65	97.0
Yelling	Yes	53	79.1
	No	14	20.9
Criticizing	Yes	19	28.4
	No	48	71.6
Scolding	Yes	35	52.2
	No	32	47.8
Offensive behaviour	Yes	7	10.4
	No	60	89.6
Jealousy	Yes	15	22.4
	No	52	77.6
Distrust	Yes	3	4.5
	No	64	95.5
Revilement	Yes	20	29.9
	No	47	70.1
Negligence	Yes	15	22.4
	No	52	77.6
Not allowing to work	Yes	10	14.9
	No	57	85.1
Unable to spend one's own money	Yes	3	4.5
	No	64	95.5
Unable to support family financially	Yes	3	4.5
	No	64	95.5

**Table 3. The Causes of Violence and the Distribution of Reactions to Violence Based on The Reports of the Pregnant Women (n= 747)**

<b>Causes of violence and reactions to violence</b>			
<b>Causes</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Husband's immediate anger	Yes	33	49.3
	No	34	50.7
Other people's influence	Yes	22	32.8
	No	45	67.2
Financial difficulties	Yes	26	38.8
	No	41	61.2
Cultural differences	Yes	2	3.0
	No	65	97.0
<b>Jealousy</b>	Yes	15	22.4
	No	52	77.6
Psychological problems	Yes	6	9.0
	No	61	91.0
Husband's bad habits (Smoking, alcohol, gambling)	Yes	2	3.0
	No	65	97.0
<b>Reactions</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Crying	Yes	40	59.7
	No	17	40.3
Yelling	Yes	24	35.8
	No	43	64.2
Arguing back	Yes	22	32.8
	No	45	67.2
Withdrawing from social life	Yes	36	53.7
	No	31	46.3
Seeking help from others	Yes	3	4.5
	No	64	95.5
<b>Causes of not reacting to violence</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Forbearance and optimism	Yes	33	49.3
	No	34	50.7
Accepting their fate	Yes	11	16.4
	No	56	83.6
Possible divorce	Yes	7	10.4
	No	60	89.6
Having nowhere to go and live	Yes	8	11.9
	No	59	88.1
Tolerating for the sake of children	Yes	34	50.7
	No	33	49.3
Fear	Yes	15	22.4
	No	52	77.6
Respect	Yes	18	26.9
	No	49	73.1
Calling the police	Yes	0	0.00
	No	67	100

with which the husband has been physically abusive toward his wife or other family members in the past.

The logistic regression analysis of the factors affecting the current pregnancies of the pregnant women included in the study is presented in Table 5. The results of the logistic regression analysis revealed that the involvement of the husband of pregnant women in violence increases their tendency to be exposed to violence by 7.89 times. The fact that the husband was exposed to domestic violence as a child also increases the risk of being subjected to violence by 7.02 times.

## DISCUSSION

It was discovered that 7.2% of the women had been subjected to physical violence at some point during their marriage, and that 2.8% of the women had been subjected to domestic violence while they were currently pregnant. It was reported that 2.5% of women in a cohort of Danish women who were experiencing their first pregnancy were exposed to some form of violence <sup>(1)</sup>. This was the first time such data was collected. According to the findings of a number of studies, the incidence of violence against pregnant women ranges from 0.9% to 20.6% in developed countries, whereas the incidence ranges from 3.09% to 8.3% in the majority of countries <sup>(17)</sup>. These rates of violence decreasing or ceasing during pregnancy are consistent with research carried out in other areas <sup>(18,19)</sup>. In spite of the fact that the findings of the current study are consistent with those of other studies of the same nature, the fact that the pregnant women in the study were restricted to seeking care at follow-up outpatient clinics for a predetermined amount of time may be regarded as a limitation. One possible explanation for the decline in violent acts committed against pregnant women is that men are becoming more sensitive to their needs.

It was also discovered that the pregnant women who were abused were victims of their husbands' immediate anger (49.3% of the cases), the influence of others (32.8% of the cases), financial difficulties (38.8% of the cases), cultural differences (3% of the cases), jealousy (22.4% of the cases), and psychological problems (9% of the cases). According to the findings of a study that was carried out in Turkey, the immediate anger of the husband accounted for 84.6% of violent incidents, while her own misbehavior accounted for 23.1%, and

**Table 4. The Distribution of Exposure to any Type of Violence According to Demographic Variables Among the Pregnant Women Included in the Study (n= 747)**

Demographic Variables	Exposure to Any Type of Violence During Pregnancy						Exposure to Any Type of Violence During any period of one's lifetime						
	Subjected to violence (n=21)			Not subjected to violence (n=680)			Subjected to violence (n=54)			Not subjected to violence (n=680)			
	n	%	P	n	%	X <sup>2</sup>	n	%	P	n	%	X <sup>2</sup>	P
Residence	Village	7	3.0	227	97.0		25	10.7		209	89.3		
	Town	4	1.9	207	98.1	0.951	15	7.1	0.62	196	92.9	7.192	0.02
	City	10	3.3	292	96.7		14	4.6		288	95.4		
Status of Desiring Pregnancy*	Undesired	6	13.3	39	86.7	19.4040	11	24.4	0.001	34	75.6	21.162	0.00
	Desired	15	2.1	687	97.9		43	6.1		659	93.9		
Status of Husband's Involvement in Violence*	Yes	6	21.4	15	704	36.904	15	53.6	0.000	13	46.4	93.159	0.00
	No	22	78.6	2.1	97.9		39	5.4		680	94.6		
Number of Pregnancies	1-2	7	1.8	379	386		21	5.4		365	94.6		
	3-4	12	5.4	212	94.6	7.636	19	8.5	0.02	205	91.5	4.192	0.12
	4 and more	2	1.5	135	98.5		14	10.2		123	89.8		
Status of being subjected to violence from husband's family	Yes	7	25.9	20	74.1		14	51.9		13	48.1		
	No	5	0.8	595	99.2	71.046	17	2.8	0.000	583	97.2	122.953	0.00
	Unknown	9	7.5	111	92.5		23	19.2		97	80.8		
Marriage type*	Voluntary/ Out of Love	7	3.3	207	96.7	0.232	21	9.8	0.39	193	90.2	2.987	0.61
	Prearranged	14	2.6	519	97.4		33	6.2		500	93.8		
Family type*	Nuclear	14	2.5	538	97.5	0.585	33	6.0	0.29	519	94.0	4.932	0.02
	Extended	7	3.6	188	96.4		21	10.8		174	89.2		
	Total	21	2.8	726	97.2	747	54	7.2	100	693	92.8		

\*Fisher chi square test was used in this correlation analysis. p<0.05

**Table 5. Logistic Regression Analysis of Factors Affecting Violence Towards Pregnant Women (n= 747)**

Variables	B	Wald	P	OR	95% C.I.	
					Lower	Upper
The involvement of the husband in violence	2.06	19.06	0.00	7.89	3.12	19.97
The husband being subjected to violence by his own family in the past	1.95	16.34	0.00	7.02	2.731	18.08
Wanting / not wanting pregnancy	0.73	2.56	0.10	2.09	0.84	5.16
Number of pregnancies	-.75	6.53	0.01	0.47	0.26	0.83

*Logistic regression analysis, p<0.05.*

economic factors accounted for 23.1%<sup>(20)</sup>. The reasons for being exposed to violence are obviously very similar, despite the fact that the studies are conducted in different locations and at different times. On the other hand, poverty is considered to be the primary factor<sup>(21)</sup>. Although social and cultural factors that have an effect on society play an active role in the exposure of women to violence, it is possible to suggest that social inequalities and a lack of communication between men and women are the primary reasons for violence.

It was discovered that the most common responses that the women had to the violence were crying (59.7%), yelling (35.8%), arguing back (32.8%), withdrawing from social life (53.7%), and seeking help from others (4.5%). It has been observed that, when confronted with violence, women typically cry or withdraw emotionally. Only a minority of them made the decision to ask for assistance from their communities. It is noteworthy that none of them turned to the police for assistance despite being the victims of physical abuse, as this is a significant development. According to the findings of a study that was conducted by Karataş et al. (2006), 54.3% of women reported that when they were subjected to violence, they wept privately<sup>(22)</sup>. According to the findings of a study conducted by Topatan et al. (2020), pregnant women who were exposed to violent situations reported experiencing feelings including fear, loneliness, anger, and shame<sup>(23)</sup>. This situation may be related to the fact that women want to conceal the domestic violence, do not want to be separated from their children, and are afraid of the reactions of their family or environment. Additionally, this situation may be related to the fact that women do not want to be separated from their children.

It was found that the pregnant women who didn't react to the violence did so for a variety of reasons. In 50.7% of the cases, they cared about their children.

In 49.3% of the cases, they showed patience and optimism. In 26.9% of the cases, they showed respect. In 22.4% of the cases, they showed fear. In 16.4% of the cases, they didn't have a place to go. In 11.9% of the cases, they were afraid of getting divorced. Altnay and Arat did research in 2009 that covered all of Turkey. Depending on where in Turkey the research was done, between 23.6% and 46.1% of people said, "I can put up with my husband's violence for the sake of my children"<sup>(24)</sup>. The results of this study show that it's more than 50%. You could say that the second-placed quality of forbearance (49.3%), and the third-placed quality of caring for children, are closely related.

In this study, a significant difference was found between the women's desire for pregnancy and being exposed to violence ( $p<0.05$ ). Studies on this subject have shown that unplanned pregnancies of partners were effective on violence<sup>(17,25,26)</sup>. Similarly, in the WHO's multi-national study, it was reported that the pregnancies of 38% of the women exposed to domestic violence were unplanned<sup>(27)</sup>. Increased number of pregnancies is a condition that strengthens the prevalence of violence ( $p<0.05$ ). In a study by Şahin et al. (2017), the prevalence of domestic violence was found to be higher among pregnant women with three or more pregnancies<sup>(28)</sup>. The prolongation of the time spent with pregnancy may have a negative effect on social-emotional relationships between spouses.

According to the findings of the study, there is a statistically significant connection between the current pregnancy and the fact that the husband has been abused by his family in the past ( $p<0.05$ ). Because the husband was a victim of domestic violence when he was a child, there is a 7.02 times greater chance that he will be a victim of physical or sexual assault in his adult life. It has been demonstrated that men who were subjected to or witnessed violence in their childhood are more likely

to engage in violent behavior toward their wives after they get married <sup>(7,29)</sup>. It's possible that boys who grow up in homes with a lot of fighting are more likely to become violent adults themselves.

In the study, it was found that there was a strong link between the husband's violence and the woman's exposure to violence while she was pregnant ( $p<0.05$ ). Abramsky et al. (2011) found that women whose husbands fought with other men were more likely to be beaten at home than those whose husbands did not fight with other men <sup>(30)</sup>. This could be because men who are violent in public are also likely to be violent at home.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that 2.8% of pregnant women were abused. Most violence is shouting and scolding. Unwanted pregnancies, family violence, husband violence, and number of pregnancies affect pregnancy violence. Pregnant women can report violence and cope with the aftermath without going to the police. Preventing violence requires family therapy, counseling, and communication skills training. Well-trained antenatal care providers should screen all women, and health policies should ensure effective interventions for needy women.

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## Author contribution

Study conception and design: SÇ, VBD, EB; data collection: SÇ, VBD, EB; analysis and interpretation of results: VBD, EB; draft manuscript preparation: VBD, EB. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## Ethical approval

The study was approved by the Mardin Artuklu University's Ethics Committee (Protocol no. 2014/04-1/08.12.2014).

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## Yazar katkısı

Araştırma fikri ve tasarımı: SÇ, VBD, NU; veri toplama: SÇ, VBD, EB; sonuçların analizi ve yorumlanması: VBD, EB; araştırma metnini hazırlama: VBD, EB. Tüm yazarlar araştırma sonuçlarını gözden geçirdi ve araştırmanın son halini onayladı.

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## Çıkar çatışması

Yazarlar herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

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