

Factors Affecting the Occupation Choices of Intern Nursing Students and Their Effects on Professional Value Perceptions: A Cross-Sectional Study

İntörn Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinin Meslek Seçimini Etkileyen Faktörlerin Profesyonel Değer Algıları Üzerine Etkisi: Kesitsel Bir Çalışma

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to determine the effects of the factors affecting the occupation choices of intern nursing students on their perceptions of professional values.

Method: The population of this cross-sectional study consisted of intern nursing students (N:280) studying at the Faculty of Nursing at a public university. No sample selection method was used in the study, aiming to reach the entire population. 181 students agreed to participate in the study. The study data were collected using a Personal Information Form, the Vocational Choices in Entering Nursing Scale, and the Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised.

Results: In the occupation choices of the participants, the most effective factors were found to be related to the items "I have always wanted to help people" (69.83±2.98) and "I believe that one cannot become unemployed in nursing" (61.87±3.07). It was determined that the independent variables were effective on the perception of professional values with an effect size of 0.25.

Conclusions: The occupation choices of intern nursing students affect their perceptions of professional values. In line with the results of this study, to enable students who will take university exams to make the right choice of occupation, programs containing information about the nursing profession may be organized in the nursing departments of universities, and guidance can be provided in this regard.

Keywords: Choice of occupation, nursing students, perception of professional value.

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Öz

Amaç: Bu araştırma intörn hemşirelik öğrencilerinin meslek seçimini etkileyen faktörlerin profesyonel değer algıları üzerine etkisini belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

Yöntem: Kesitsel türde yapılan bu araştırmanın evrenini, bir kamu üniversitesi hemşirelik fakültesinde öğrenim gören intörn hemşirelik öğrencileri (N:280) oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada örneklem seçim yöntemine gidilmeyip, evrenin tamamına ulaşılmaya çalışılmıştır. Araştırmaya gönüllü olarak 181 öğrenci katılmıştır. Araştırmanın verileri; “Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Hemşirelikte Meslek Seçimi Ölçeği ve Hemşirelerin Profesyonel Değerleri Ölçeği-Revize” kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Verilerin değerlendirilmesinde; sayı, yüzde dağılımı, ortalama, standart sapma, Cronbach Alpha güvenirlik katsayısı, Basit Doğrusal Regresyon (Simple Linear Regression) Analizi ve Enter Modeli kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular: Araştırmaya katılan intörn hemşirelik öğrencilerinin meslek seçiminde en etkili olan, “her zaman insanlara yardım etmek istemişimdir” (69,83±2,98) ve “hemşirelikte işsiz kalınmayacağını düşünüyorum” (61,87±3,07) maddesi olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bağımsız değişkenlerin, 0,25 etki büyüklüğünde profesyonel değer algısı üzerinde etkili olduğu belirlenmiştir.

Sonuç: İntörn hemşirelik öğrencilerinin meslek seçimi, profesyonel değer algılarını etkilemektedir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları doğrultusunda; üniversite sınavına girecek öğrencilerin meslek seçimini doğru yapabilmeleri için üniversitelerin hemşirelik bölümlerinde, hemşirelik mesleği hakkında bilgi içeren programlar düzenlenebilir ve bu konuda öğrencilere rehberlik yapılabilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Hemşirelik öğrencileri, meslek seçimi, profesyonel değer algısı.

Introduction

Occupation is defined as a job acquired through specific training to sustain the lives of individuals, provide useful services and earn money in return, depending on an extensive accumulation of knowledge based on systematic knowledge and skills and having duties, authorities, and responsibilities determined by law (Alkaya, Yaman & Simones, 2018; Kırığ, 2015; Olğun & Adıbelli, 2020; Önler & Saraçoğlu, 2010; Tosunöz, Eskimez & Öztunç, 2019). Occupation is an important source of the individual's identity and is expressed as a realm that enables good communication with others and a reputable place in society (Özveren, Gülнар & Özden, 2017).

Occupation choice is defined as the individual's tendency toward the field which suits their personality traits and skills among different occupational groups in which they believe they can do best, be successful, and have satisfaction (Ince & Khorshid, 2015; Özveren et al., 2017; Tosunöz et al., 2019). Since individuals spend approximately one-third of their lives in activities related to their profession, it is stated that the satisfaction and happiness they will obtain from occupational activities will influence their general satisfaction with life. Therefore, a person's occupation choice is determined as one of the most important decisions that they make to be more beneficial to themselves and society (Kırığ, 2015; Özveren et al., 2017; Temel, Bilgiç & Çelikkalp, 2018). It is stated that choosing the right occupation is the first step to being happy in one's professional and private life. Achieving a good career and making a responsible occupation choice is of great importance for both the individual and the future of their country (Özveren et al., 2017; Tosunöz et al., 2019). Many factors affect the occupation choices of individuals (Ince & Khorshid, 2015).

Today, while technological developments, rapid social changes, and globalization lead to the emergence of different occupations, they also reduce some occupations' social status and economic opportunities. It was expressed that this situation affects students' occupation choices (Kılınc, Altun, Kemer & Öztürk, 2020). It was stated that factors affecting occupation choices differ among countries and cultures (Pazarcıkci & Dilmen, 2019). Just as in every field, occupation choice is significant for nursing. Nursing, one of the most important occupational groups in health services, has a significant role in protecting and improving the health of individuals, families, and society as a basic labor force in the planning and evaluation of health services. Many personal and professional factors affect students' choice of the nursing profession (Ince & Khorshid, 2015; Özveren et al., 2017; Temel et al., 2018; Tosunöz et al., 2019). According to Alkaya et al. (2018), factors that are effective in choosing nursing are the person's desire to help others, their will to work with people, financial issues, and career diversity. Studies on factors affecting the preference for nursing by students in Turkey have revealed that most students choose nursing because of their desire to help people, guaranteed job opportunities, their belief that they will be

good nurses, their intention to continue nursing, and the view that the financial benefits of the profession of nursing are adequate (İnce & Khorshid, 2015; Kırığ, 2015; Olğun & Adıbelli, 2020; Temel et al., 2018; Tosunöz et al., 2019; Zencir & Eşer, 2016). Previous studies stated that most nursing students prefer this occupation because of the opportunity to find a job (İnce & Khorshid, 2015; Kırığ, 2015). Nursing is defined as an occupation with certain difficulties (such as working with a shift and watch system) and emphasizes the health of individuals and occupational professionalism (Kılınç et al., 2020).

Professionalism is expressed as a quality that requires expertise, knowledge, and skills that the individual wants to do their job with care, love, and ethical principles. It requires that the individual can take responsibility, has decision-making skills, and adheres to ethical principles (Avcı et al., 2019; Elmalı, 2020; Karadağlı, 2016). Being a professional requires having some values (Avcı et al., 2019). Values are defined as the principles and standards individuals care about while making decisions and the beliefs they have adopted. Values represent basic situations about what is right, good, or desirable and motivate social and professional behaviors (Alkaya et al., 2018; Avcı et al., 2019). Professional values are intangible and defined as general behavioral principles that set the basic standards for judging goals and actions. It was expressed that professional values are the main sources of nursing practices, and they guide nurses while performing their job (Karadağlı, 2016). The professional values of nurses guide them in their nursing care practices, decisions, and solutions to ethical problems and interact with other members of the healthcare team, other nurses, and society (Alkaya et al., 2018). Accordingly, the acquisition of professional values is at the center of professional development in nursing (Bang et al., 2011). Nursing students gain their professional identity and develop and learn professional values in themselves during their student years. It was stated that the development of these values continues after graduation (Acaroğlu, 2014; Arkan, Ordin & Haney, 2018). The professional value perceptions of nursing students who willingly and intentionally choose their profession may change since they start to acquire, absorb, and emphasize these values during their school years. Thus, this study was conducted to determine the effects of factors related to the occupation choices of intern nursing students on their professional value perceptions.

Method

Aim and Design: This cross-sectional study aimed to determine the effects of factors influencing intern nursing students' occupation choices on their perceptions of professional values.

Research Questions: In this study, an answer to the following question was sought.

- Do factors affecting intern nursing students' occupation choices affect their perceptions of professional values?

Time and Place: The study was performed in a public university nursing faculty between February and March 2021.

Population and Sample: Intern nursing students (N: 280) attending the public university nursing faculty formed the study population. No sampling method was adopted in this study, and it aimed to reach the entire population. The study was completed with 181 students who voluntarily agreed to participate. Students with a sick report or absenteeism were not included in the study.

Data Collection Tools: The study data were collected using a Personal Information Form prepared by the researcher, the Vocational Choices in Entering Nursing Scale, and the Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised (NPVS-R).

Personal Information Form: This form contained 8 questions about the introductory characteristics of the participants, such as age, gender, Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), high school of graduation, accommodation status, and family economic status.

Vocational Choices in Entering Nursing Scale (VCNS): The Vocational Choices in Entering Nursing Scale is a Likert-type scale of 20 items and two dimensions developed by Zysberg and Berry in 2005 to determine the reasons for nursing students' occupation choices. The two dimensions that make up this scale are Vocational Congruency and Survival (Zysberg & Berry, 2005). The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Önlü and Saraçoğlu (2010). The Turkish form of the scale consists of 17 items and two dimensions, Vocational Congruency and Survival.

The scale is a Likert-type scale with minimum and maximum total scores of 0 to 100. The Vocational Congruency dimension consists of 11 items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17), and the Survival dimension consists of 6 items (6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13) (Önler & Saraçoğlu, 2010). The total scale and subscale scores are obtained by dividing the sum of the items scores by the number of items. According to the scores obtained from the scale, the reasons that affect participants' choice of nursing within the context of independent variables are compared (Önler & Saraçoğlu, 2010). In the study by Önler and Saraçoğlu that adapted this scale to Turkish, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.79. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the scale's Vocational Congruency and Survival dimensions were reported as 0.77 and 0.63, respectively (Önler & Saraçoğlu, 2010). The scale Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was determined to be 0.90 in this study, while the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the Vocational Congruency and Survival dimensions were 0.92 and 0.70, respectively.

Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised (NPVS-R): The Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised was developed by Weis and Schank (2009) to reveal the professional values of nurses. The validity and reliability of the scale in Turkish were tested by Geçkil, Ege, Akın, and Göz (2012). The five-point Likert-type scale consists of 26 items and 5 dimensions (Caring, Professionalism, Activism, Justice, Trust). The lowest and highest possible scores on the scale are 26 and 130. Higher scores indicate higher levels of professional values. In the Turkish adaptation of the scale by Geçkil et al. (2012), the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.92. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the scale dimensions were between 0.53 and 0.84 (Geçkil et al., 2012). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale in this study was 0.95, and those of its dimensions were 0.71-0.90.

Data Collection: The study data were collected by sending an online questionnaire (due to the restrictions brought about by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic) via the Google Forms platform to all intern nursing students attending the public university nursing faculty.

Data Analysis: The data collected in the study were analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) statistical package software. Frequency, percentage distribution, mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, simple linear regression analysis, and the Enter model were used to analyze the data. The simple linear regression analysis and Enter model showed results on the introductory characteristics of the participants and the effects of their choices of occupation on their professional value perceptions. Variables such as occupation choice, survival dimension, age, gender, cumulative grade point average (CGPA), high school of graduation, place of accommodation, economic status, the reason for choosing the nursing department, and education on professional values were used as the independent variables. The model excluded the vocational congruency dimension as an independent variable. So, it was not included in the table. Professional value perception was taken as the dependent variable. The Enter model of simple linear regression analysis fully revealed the affecting variables.

Study Variables: Independent variables: Intern nursing students' occupation choice, survival dimension score, vocational congruency dimension score, age, gender, Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), high school of graduation, place of accommodation, economic status, the reason for preferring the nursing department, and status of having received education about professional values. Dependent Variable: Intern nursing students' professional value perceptions.

Ethical Consideration: Written approval was obtained from the İnönü University Health Sciences Ethics Committee for Non-Invasive Clinical Research (Resolution No: 2021/1786). For the scales to be used in the study, the necessary permissions were also obtained via e-mail from the authors who developed the scales. Besides, written permission was obtained from the İnönü University Nursing Faculty Dean's Office to perform the study.

Limitations: This study was performed in a nursing faculty of a university in eastern Turkey. Therefore, the results obtained in this study cover only the nursing students of the faculty where the study was performed. The data were collected online due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which was a study limitation.

Results

The results of this study, which was conducted to determine the effects of factors influencing the occupation choices of intern nursing students on their professional value perceptions, are given below.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of participants (N=181)

Descriptive characteristics (N=181)	n	%
Gender		
Female	124	68.5
Male	57	31.5
High school		
Science High School	8	4.4
Anatolian High School	130	71.8
Vocational High School of Health	3	1.7
Normal High School	34	18.8
Vocational High School	6	3.3
Accommodation		
State dormitory (CDI)	72	39.8
Private dormitory	2	1.1
At home with friends	14	7.7
At home with family	93	51.4
Economic status		
High	23	12.7
Moderate	147	81.2
Low	11	6.1
Reason for choosing nursing		
By own will	57	31.5
Family/environmental pressure	32	17.7
Job guarantee	92	50.8
Received education about professional values		
Yes	68	37.6
No	113	62.4
X±SD		
Age	22.13±1.54	
CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average)	2.87±0.35	

According to the data collected about the introductory characteristics of the participants (Table 1), most participants (68.5%) were females, had a mean age of 22.13±1.54, had a mean cumulative grade point average of 2.87±0.35, most participants were living with their families (51.4%), and most of the participants opted for nursing as an occupation due to guaranteed job opportunities (50.8%). It was determined that most of the participants (62.4%) had not received education on professional values (Table 1).

Table 2. Mean scores of participants in Vocational Choices in Entering Nursing Scale (VCNS) (N: 181)

Vocational Choices in Entering Nursing Scale	X±SD
Vocational Congruency Dimension (Total Score)	48.81±22.52
-I have always wanted to be a nurse.	28.39±2.42
-I think that nursing is an occupation that suits my personality.	45.63±3.0
-I have always wanted to help people.	69.83±2.98
-I desired to have a job which enables me to express myself.	65.80±3.05
-I think that nursing is a good career opportunity for me.	41.32±3.30
-People around me say that I can make a good nurse.	66.90±3.00
-Nursing is a reputable occupation in the eyes of people.	33.64±2.85
-I believe that I can be a leader in nursing.	51.54±3.17
-Nursing is a convenient occupation for me and my family.	49.50±3.13
-It is attractive for me that nursing has part-time and shift working conditions.	43.37±3.19
-I looked for a job to meet my requirements and opted for nursing.	41.04±3.02
Survival Dimension (Total Score)	40.22±19.62
-I would love to have another job, but I could not.	56.62±3.63
-I preferred nursing since I think that it will always be a favored occupation.	34.91±3.15
-I had no other choice but nursing.	30.00±3.21
-I think that one cannot become unemployed in nursing.	61.87±3.07
-One makes good money in nursing.	33.92±2.40
-There is no job I can do other than nursing.	24.97±2.90

The mean scores of the participants in the “Vocational Congruency” and “Survival” dimensions were found to be 48.81±22.52 and 40.22±19.62, respectively (Table 2). Among the scale items, the item with the highest mean score was “I have always wanted to help people” (69.83±2.98) in the “Vocational Congruency” dimension and “I think one cannot become unemployed in nursing” (61.87±3.07) in the “Survival” dimension (Table 2).

Table 3. Mean scores of participants in Nurses Professional Values Scale-Revised (NPVS-R) and its dimensions (N: 181)

Scale and Factors	Min-Max	X±SD
NPVS-R (Total Score)	64-130	105.07±15.41
Caring	19-40	33.61±4.89
Professionalism	17-35	27.61±4.47
Activism	12-25	20.12±3.56
Justice	7-15	12.27±1.97
Trust	4-15	11.44±2.22

The mean total NPVS-R score of the participants was determined to be 105.07±15.41. Their mean scores in the dimensions of the scale were 33.61±4.89 for Caring, 27.61±4.47 for Professionalism, 20.12±3.56 for Activism, 12.27±1.97 for Justice, and 11.44±2.22 for Trust (Table 3).

As seen in Table 4, the selected independent variables were significantly effective on professional value perceptions with an effect size of 0.25 ($R^2=0.256$) ($p<0.05$). It was determined that the survival dimension significantly affected professional value perceptions ($p<0.05$). The independent variable of age significantly affected professional perceptions ($p<0.05$). This effect of age was negative (-1.670), and as the ages of the participants increased, their professional value perceptions decreased.

Table 4. Explanation of the factors affecting the professional value perceptions of participants by regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	111.439	19.298		5.775	0.000**	73.345	149.533
Occupation Choices (Total)	.468	.090	.577	5.214	0.000**	.291	.645
Survival dimension	-.207	.088	-.264	-2.356	0.020*	-.381	-.034
Age	-1.670	.728	-.167	-2.294	0.023*	-3.107	-.233
Gender	-1.974	2.431	-.060	-.812	0.418	-6.773	2.824
Cumulative Grade Point Average	3.954	3.054	.092	-1.295	0.197	-2.075	9.983
High school of graduation	1.360	1.179	.084	1.154	0.250	-.967	3.687
Place of accommodation	1.235	.745	.114	1.658	0.099	-.235	2.705
Economic status	1.597	2.474	.044	.645	0.520	-3.288	6.481
Reason for preferring the nursing department	1.494	1.306	.086	1.144	0.254	-1.084	4.072
Having received education about professional values	-2.644	2.175	.083	-1.215	0.226	-6.938	1.651
	R	R ²	F	p			
	.505 ^a	.256	5.835	0.000**			

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Predictors: (Constant), occupation choice total, survival dimension, age, gender, Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), high school of graduation, place of accommodation, economic status, the reason for preferring the nursing department, and having received education about professional values.

Dependent variable: Professional value perception.

Discussion

This study's findings, which were conducted to determine the effects of factors influencing the occupation choices of intern nursing students on their professional value perceptions, are discussed here, in line with the literature.

In this study, among the mean scores of the participants for each item of VCNS, the item "I have always wanted to help people" had the highest mean score in the "Vocational Congruency" dimension and "I think that one cannot become unemployed in nursing" had the highest score in the "Survival" dimension. Similar results have been found in other studies conducted in Turkey (Ergün & Güzel 2016; İnce & Khorshid, 2015; Kulakçı, Ayyıldız, Yıldırım, Veren & Topan 2015; Oğun & Adıbelli, 2020; Özveren et al., 2017; Pazarcıkcı & Dilmen, 2019; Temel et al., 2018; Tosunöz et al., 2019). Since we are a benevolent society in general, the desire to help an individual who is in a more difficult situation as a patient and make an effort for the individual to regain their health may be why students prefer nursing. Besides, nursing is among the professions with the highest possibility of finding a job after university education, both in the government and the private sector in Turkey, giving rise to the idea that students choose nursing because they believe they will not become unemployed.

The mean total NPVS-R score of the participants of this study was determined to be high. Since the highest possible score on this scale is 130, the participants perceived high professional value levels. In a study conducted by Bleda, Alvarez, and Prat (2020) in Spain, nursing students' perceptions regarding the importance of professional values were average. In a study conducted by Arkan et al. (2019) with nursing students, the students' mean professional values score was on a good level. Alkaya et al. (2018) reported the professional value scores of American and Turkish nursing students as high. Other studies have revealed similar results to those in this study (Arkan et al., 2019; Arries, 2020; Bang et al., 2011; Can & Acaroğlu 2015; Caner et al., 2019; Dündar, Özsoy, Toptaş & Aksu, 2019; Fernandez-Feito, Basurto-Hoyuelos, Palmeiro-Longo & Garcia-Diaz 2019; Lacobucci, Daly, Lindell & Griffin 2012; Uslusoy, Gürdoğan & Aydınli, 2017). Instructors create the necessary professional awareness in the theoretical and practical courses of intern nursing students to enable them to

be in a position to graduate in their final year, that is, to make them absorb all values in the professional context from their first year to their graduation. It may be stated that the formation of professional awareness affects the level of professional responsibility and increases the student's perception levels of professional values.

This study determined that the participants' introductory characteristics and occupation choices were effective on their perceptions of professional values with an effect size of 0.25. Students' selection of nursing due to their love of helping people and the idea that the profession guarantees finding a job may suggest that these choices also affect their professional value perceptions by embracing professional awareness and responsibility and adopting a professional identity. This study found that participants choosing nursing since they wanted to help people indicated that they had high levels of perceived self-esteem, self-respect, and conscience. This situation proposes that they improved the meaning they attributed to their occupation and increased their professional value perceptions by raising their professional competence. Besides, the likelihood of a student who prefers the profession of nursing to help people to be aware of the significance of patients' health, safety, privacy, protection of their ethical and legal rights, and patient advocacy may increase their professional value perceptions. Students who choose their occupations because they like helping people may be considered aware of the importance of providing an effective and quality health service to healthy or ill individuals under the principles of respect and trust, which could increase their perceptions of professional values. In Turkey, nursing being among the professions with the possibility of finding a job after graduating from university shows that students prefer nursing because of its job guarantee. It may be argued that by having individuals pay importance to the profession, a job guarantee renders them able to adopt the professional values of the profession by actively and healthily contributing to their activities directed to increasing their knowledge and skills in professional realms, becoming successful, and improving their jobs. The possibility of students who choose their professions for guaranteed jobs, being aware of the importance of professional nursing associations by understanding the significance of health policies for the development and progression of their profession, positively affects and increases their perceptions of professional values.

This study determined that age, one of the independent variables, negatively affected professional value perceptions. As the ages of the participants increased, their professional value perceptions decreased. Unlike this study, a study conducted by Arries (2020) in Canada found that professional values' perceptions went up as students' ages increased. As students get older, their opinions towards their intended occupation tend to shift toward issues related to financial gains. This is because nursing is among the professions with the highest possibilities to find a job after university graduation in Turkey, giving rise to the idea that it causes students to turn towards economic gains. In this case, nursing students may prefer the occupation because they will not be unemployed, rather than their occupational professionalism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was determined that most of the participants preferred nursing because they wanted to help people and thought they would not become unemployed. The professional value perceptions of the participants were high. The participants' introductory characteristics (e.g., age, gender) and occupation choices affected their professional value perceptions.

Due to the results of this study, it is recommended to enable students who will take university exams to make the right occupation choice, programs containing information about nursing may be organized at the nursing departments of universities, and guidance can be provided in this regard. Topics related to the professional values of nurses could be emphasized in nursing curricula to internalize and adopt professional values. Besides, it may be recommended to perform studies on this topic with different and larger samples.

Implications for Nursing Practice: The findings in this study that the choice of profession affected the professional value perceptions of the participants may lead to the creation of policies to improve the working conditions of nurses by raising awareness. Accordingly, the improvement of the working conditions of nurses will increase the preference for this profession, and this will affect professional value perceptions positively by paying importance to the profession.

Ethics Committee Approval: İnönü University, Scientific Research and Publicational Ethics Committee: Health Sciences Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee approval was obtained (Date: 09.03.2021 - Number: 2021/1786).

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Informed Consent: Written informed consents of the participants were obtained.

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