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Study on Mindfulness and Perceived stress between Private sector and Public Sector Employees

Abstract

Background: A workplace is an important place where an employee spends most of the time. The level of well-being and productivity an employee has depends on how well the stresses at the workplace are managed. As the stresses at the workplace are increasing and affecting the quality of life, it is important to study the effectiveness of mindfulness in mitigating stress and improving well-being. **Aim:** The aim of the study was to study the level of mindfulness and perceived stress between the private sector and public sector employees. **Methods:** A total of 156 participants, of which 96 were private-sector employees and 60 were public sector employees, 67 female and 89 male employees were studied. Five facets of the mindfulness questionnaire were used to measure the level of mindfulness, and the perceived stress questionnaire was used to assess the level of stress. **Results and Conclusion:** The study has found that there was no statistically significant difference ($p>.05$) in mindfulness and perceived stress between private sector employees and public sector employees. There was a negative correlation between mindfulness and perceived stress ($r= -.504, p<.01$). The study has concluded that mindfulness is an effective tool in mitigating workplace stress and in improving the psychological well-being of employees. Effective mindfulness programs should be designed and employees should be encouraged to participate in them.

Keywords: Mindfulness, perceived stress, private sector employees, psychological well-being, public sector employees

Introduction

Nowadays, in the era of competitive environment and toxic lifestyle, there are reports of stress, mental tension, anxiety, etc., among employees working in both the private and public sectors, which affects their psychological well-being. A workplace is an important place where an employee spends most of the time on a daily basis but the stresses due to the workplace have been a

neglected aspect of mental health issues. This requires thorough studies so that possible interventions can be provided (Maulik, 2017). Research in psychology has started documenting the benefits of mindfulness and it is in this light it is important to evaluate the role of mindfulness in dealing with stress and psychological well-being at the workplace.

Mindfulness is an old concept,

Divye Kartikey¹, Subodh Kumar²

¹Student, MA Clinical Psychology, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Maidan Garhi, New Delhi, India, E-mail: divyekartikey21591@gmail.com

²Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. E-mail: bhu.subodh@gmail.com

Correspondence Address:

Mr Divye Kartikey

Student, MA Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Maidan Garhi ,New Delhi-110068. India. E-mail: divyekartikey21591@gmail.com

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which came from ancient eastern spiritual and cultural traditions out of their reflection and contemplation of the meaning of life and suffering. According to Baer et al. (2006), mindfulness is a non-judgmental observation of internal and external stimuli. According to Bishop et al. (2004) mindfulness means the ability to self-regulate attention from one aspect of an experience to another and also form and hold an attitude towards it.

Perceived Stress is stress that an individual perceives through its cognition. Any stress is a response of the body to a demand. The nature of a demand or demands is such that it exceeds the resources available thereby disturbing the equilibrium in the body. Stress comes from the external environment but internal perception also plays a role.

An individual's perception of an external event and internal state decides the response towards stress. A person may feel stressed in one situation while another person may not feel that way because of the difference in cognition towards the stressful event. This cognitive appraisal takes place at primary and secondary levels. At the primary level, the appraisal is made of whether the event is stressful or dangerous. Then secondary appraisal is about how to cope with the stress and resources that can be used. It is because of this reason that stress can be measured as perceived stress (Berjot & Gillet, 2011).

In an experiment by Baer et al. (2008) two groups, who practiced mindfulness and those who did not, were compared. For this, both the groups were given inventories to assess various features like mindfulness, depression, anxiety, absent-mindedness, emotional regulation, personality and overall well-being. It was found that those who practiced mindfulness had reduced psychological problems, rumination and stress in comparison to the group which did not practice.

In a study by Ortner et al. (2007), an experiment was conducted to compare the amount of emotional interference between mindfulness practitioners and non-mindfulness practitioners by presenting a sound of tone after showing an emotional or a neutral picture. The participants after seeing the picture had to react to the tone and this reaction time was noted to calculate emotional inference. Normally emotional pictures would reduce participants' ability to react to the tones much more than neutral pictures due to emotional inference. However, it was found that groups that practiced mindfulness had less reaction time and hence much less emotional inference. Their ability to detach themselves from the emotional picture and react in time to the sound of the tones was the main highlight of the study.

Iwamoto et al. (2020) found that mindfulness significantly activates altruistic behavior. In the study, 326 participants were assigned to two different groups. Participants of the first group were put into a mindfulness program and the second was a control group. Participants of both groups were measured on their willingness to donate to a charity. The group which went through the mindfulness program donated 2.61 times more than the control group.

A study on the impact of mindfulness on working memory was conducted by Jha et al. (2010). In the study, two groups of army personnel were formed. One group of army personnel was put on an eight-week program in mindfulness and another was a control group. Both groups had been deployed in highly stressful environments. It was found that the group which practiced mindfulness had increased working memory capabilities.

Coo and Salanova (2018) conducted an experiment in which two groups were formed from a Spanish public hospital. The experiment group received a mindfulness-based program, whereas the Control

group was not given any mindfulness-based intervention. Participants were evaluated on work management, happiness and performance before and after the mindfulness programme. It was found that the experiment group, which received mindfulness-based programmes, showed high levels in all the above factors.

Study by Maya et al. (2019) showed the effect of mindfulness on depression. In this experiment 36 Spanish speaking and 40 English speaking participants, suffering from moderate levels of stress, were taken and were randomly distributed into two groups. One group was put on mindfulness-based awareness practice and another group was provided with health education. Depression between both the groups was measured. It was found that the group which was put on mindfulness-based awareness practices had improved symptoms of depression than the group which was provided health education only.

A study by Chambers et al. (2008) on the effect of mindfulness on factors like rumination, attention and working memory was done. In this, a group of 20 participants was put into a mindfulness programme for 10 days and were evaluated before and after the programme. The study concluded that the Mindfulness programme produced significant improvements in mindfulness, rumination, functioning of working memory and attention.

Role of Mindfulness in managing stresses of relationship was studied in a short-term longitudinal design by recruiting 82 dating students from a university. Relevant constructs like mindfulness and relationship satisfaction were measured two times with the gap of 10 weeks in between. The finding of the study was that on both the occasions of measurement there was a significant relationship

between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction (Barnes et al., 2007).

Thus, from the study of the above literature, it was found that there is a relationship between Mindfulness and perceived stress.

METHODS

Sample

A total of 156 participants were taken for the study as a sample. The sample had 96 private-sector employees and 60 public sector employees. Among the participants, 67 were females and 89 were males.

Tools

A demographic sheet was prepared and information was collected related to age, sex, marital status, type of family, educational qualification, occupational status, and any prior illness.

1) Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)

Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire constructed by Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, and Toney in 2006 was used to measure the level of mindfulness in an individual. It is a 39-item self-reporting questionnaire. It has 5 dimensions namely:

- 1) Observation: It involves awareness of inner feelings and external environment
- 2) Describing: It is the labeling of our thoughts and feelings and describing them what they are.
- 3) Acting with Awareness: It is the ability to

live in present and ignore distractions

- 4) Non-reactivity: This refers to staying calm and not reacting to thoughts and feelings which are disturbing
- 5) Non-judging of inner experience: It is the ability to perceive one's thoughts and feelings in a neutral way.

The five facets of the mindfulness questionnaire have internal consistency, with alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.91. Construct Validity was measured and established by Baer et al (2008) in a study where a significant positive correlation was found between five facets of mindfulness and Psychological well-being scale (PWB). FFMQ is a 5 point likert scale ranging from Never to Very Often. The scoring format is 1 for Never, 2 for Rarely, 3 for Sometimes, 4 for Often and 5 for Very Often. For the reverse items scoring will become opposite. The score for each subscale is calculated by adding the individual scores of each of the items under the subscale. The total score is done by adding the scores of all the subscales (Baer et al., 2008).

2) Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is one of the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are perceived as stressful. Internal consistency (cronbach alpha) was in the range of .84 to .86. Test retest reliability was .85 and construct validity of .52 to .76 was established with similar stress scales. PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items. (Cohen et al., 1983).

Procedure

In this study, a purposive sampling was used to collect data from the specific population selected. Participants were provided with a description of the study and its objectives. Participants were sent the questionnaires in Google form on their email or WhatsApp. A total of 156 adults participated in this study during the months of October-November, 2021.

Statistical Analysis: Pearson correlation was used to find the correlation between continuous variables i.e., five facets of mindfulness and perceived stress. Descriptive statistics and t-test was used to measure the mean difference in continuous variables between two groups i.e. between the private sector and public sector employees. Data were analyzed with the help of SPSS software

RESULTS

The results obtained from data analysis are grouped into demographic details, Mindfulness, perceived stress, and correlation between the variables.

A sample of 156 participants was studied. The demographic profile of the sample studied was as follows. The mean age of the sample was 37.44 (SD= 9.668). Females constitute 42.9% (n=67) of the sample and male constitute 57.1% (n=89) of the sample. All the participants were educated. 15.4 % (n=24) of the participants are Ph.D. holders, 56.4% (n=88) are postgraduates, 25.6% (n=40) are graduates. All the participants were employed. 61.5% (n=96) of the participants were employed in the private sector and 38.5% (n=60) were employed in the public sector. In the private sector, females (n=48) constitute 71.6 % and males (n=48) constitute 53.9%. In the public sector, females (n=19) constitute 28.4% and males (n=41) constitute 46.1 %. Most of the participants were married. 67.9% (n=106) of the participants were

Table 1

Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Variables		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	<i>Females</i>	67	42.9
	<i>Males</i>	89	57.1
Marital status	<i>Married</i>	106	67.9
	<i>Single</i>	50	32.1
Family type	<i>Joint family</i>	61	39.1
	<i>Nuclear family</i>	95	60.9
Education	<i>Graduate</i>	40	25.6
	<i>Post Graduate</i>	88	56.4
	<i>M. Phil</i>	4	2.6
	<i>Ph. D.</i>	24	15.4
Occupational Status	<i>Private sector</i>	96	61.5
	<i>Public sector</i>	60	38.5
Any Illness	<i>No</i>	126	80.8
	<i>Yes</i>	30	19.2

married and the rest were singles. Most of the participants were living in a nuclear family. 60.9 % (n=95) participants were living in a nuclear family. Lastly, only 19.2% (n=30) of the participants reported that they are suffering from some kind of illness like blood pressure, sugar, thyroid, etc.

The mean score for FFMQ (n=156) was 128.26 (SD=16.155). Among the five facets of mindfulness, the facet of acting with awareness was highest (28.60 ± 5.97). The prevalence of Other facets of mindfulness in descending order are as follows: describing (27.88 ± 5.21), observing (26.07 ± 5.63), non-judging (23.85 ± 5.53), and nonreactivity (21.86 ± 4.27).

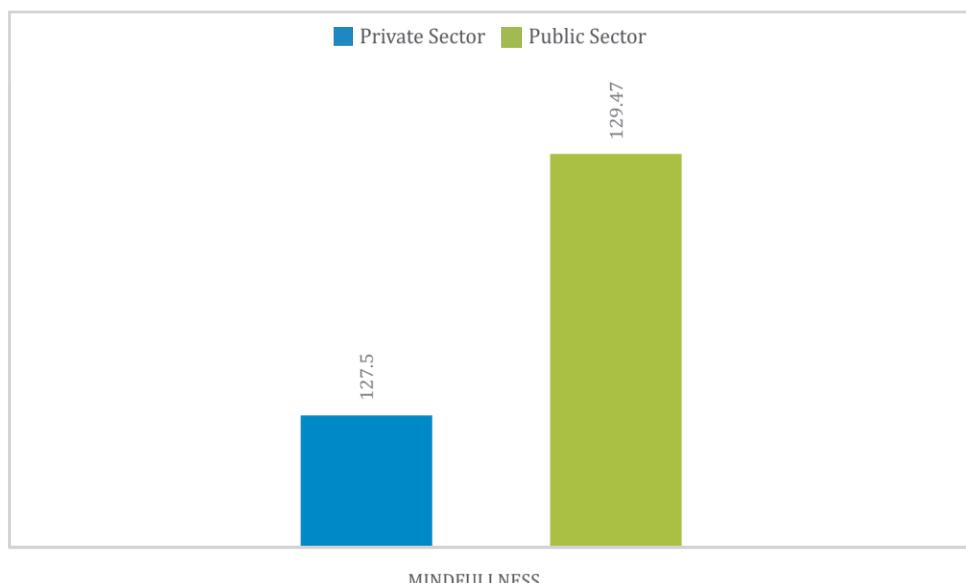
The mean score of FFMQ and its five facets were compared between the private sector and public sector employees. It was found that the FFMQ score was higher in public sector employees (129.47 ± 17.88). Observing was higher in public sector employees (26.75 ± 5.64).

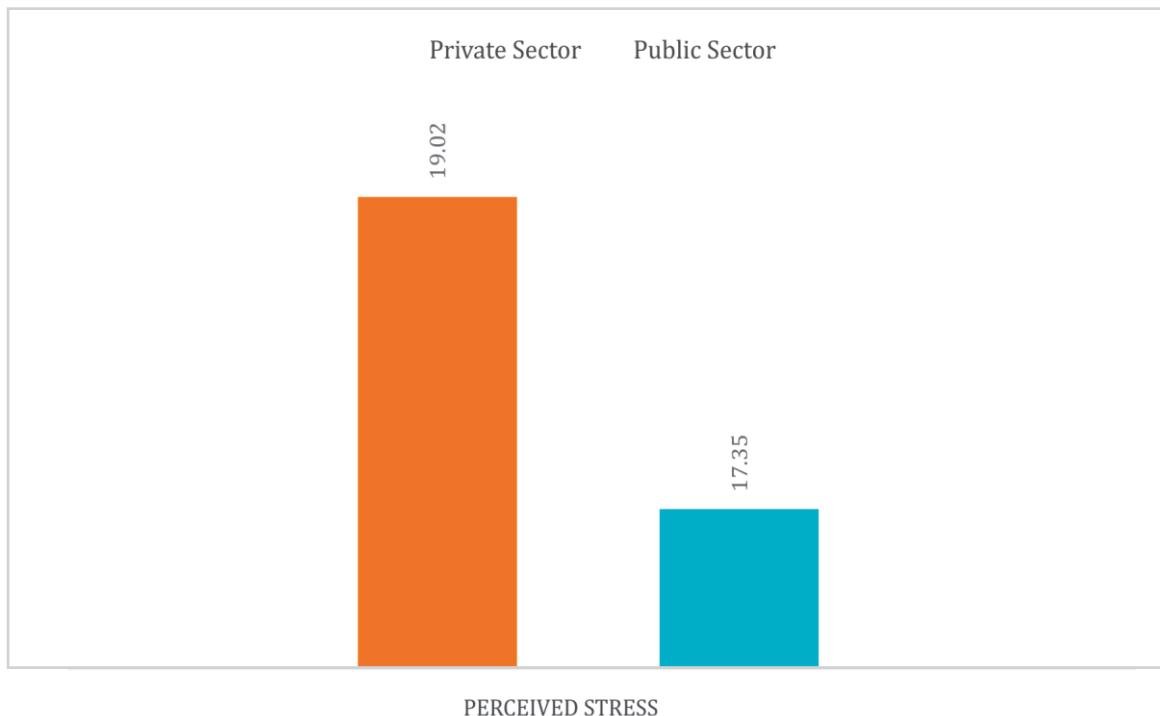
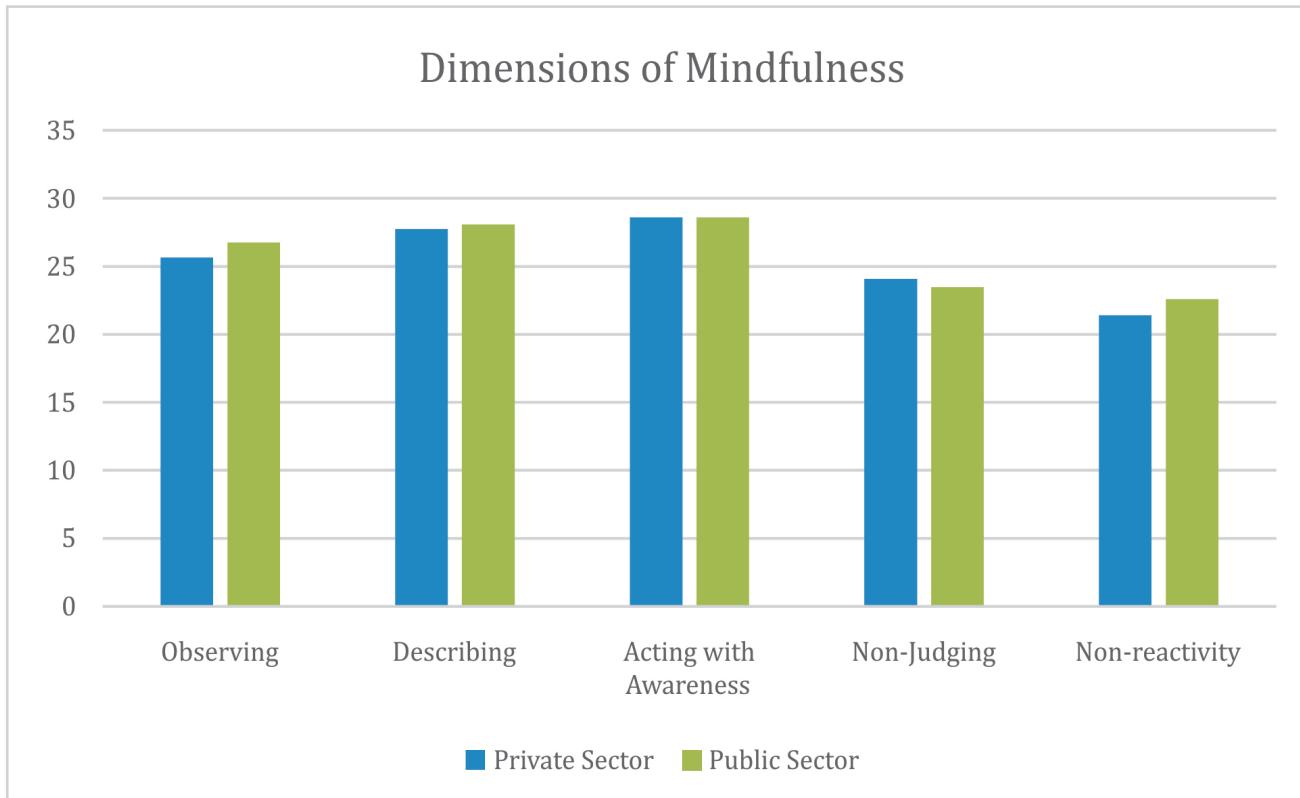
Describing was higher in public sector employees (28.07 ± 5.517). Acting with awareness was higher in public sector employees (28.60 ± 6.452). Non-judging was higher in private sector employees (24.09 ± 5.363) and nonreactivity was higher in public sector employees (22.58 ± 4.311). An Independent sample t-test was performed on the above scores between the private sector and public sector employees. It was found that there was no significant difference (p>.05) between the private sector and public sector employees in terms of mindfulness and its five facets.

The mean score for perceived stress (n=156) was 18.38 (SD=6.433). The mean score of Perceived stress was compared between the private sector and public sector employees. It was found that the mean score of perceived stress was higher in the private sector (19.02 ± 6.22). The independent sample t-test was performed on the above scores between the private sector and public sector employees, and it was found that there was no significant difference (p>.05) between the perceived stress of the private sector and public sector employees.

Table 2**Distribution of Five facets of Mindfulness and Perceived stress between private sector and public sector employees (df= 154)**

Variables	Occupational Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p value
Five Facets of Mindfulness	Private Sector	96	127.50	15.021	-.739	0.461
	Public Sector	60	129.47	17.886		
Observing	Private Sector	96	25.65	5.631	-1.191	0.236
	Public Sector	60	26.75	5.644		
Describing	Private Sector	96	27.76	5.047	-0.356	0.723
	Public Sector	60	28.07	5.517		
Acting with Awareness	Private Sector	96	28.59	5.688	-0.006	0.995
	Public Sector	60	28.60	6.452		
Non-Judging	Private Sector	96	24.09	5.363	0.685	0.494
	Public Sector	60	23.47	5.870		
Non-reactivity	Private Sector	96	21.41	4.209	-1.684	0.094
	Public Sector	60	22.58	4.311		
Perceived Stress	Private Sector	96	19.02	6.222	1.586	0.115
	Public Sector	60	17.35	6.681		





Correlation:

Table 3

Correlation among the factors of five facets of mindfulness, perceived stress and Age

	Five Facets of Mindfulness	Perceived Stress	Age
1. Five Facets of Mindfulness	1	-	-
2. Perceived stress	-.504**	1	-
3. Age	.224**	-.327**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation was calculated and studied among the factors of mindfulness, perceived stress and age. It was found that five facets of mindfulness had a significant negative correlation ($r = -.504$, $p < .01$) with perceived stress. Age had a significant positive correlation ($r = .224$, $p < .01$) with five facets of mindfulness and a significant negative correlation ($r = -.327$, $p < .01$) with perceived stress.

Discussion

The studies reviewed were mostly conducted on college students and practitioners of mindfulness, like in the case of Baer et al. (2008) and Ortner et al. (2007). Studies like Jha et al. (2010) have studied mindfulness in army personnel. However, Stress in academic institutions is quite different from stress at the workplace. The pressure to perform and meet deadlines has been a cause of stress for employees as pointed out by Maulik (2017). There is a need to replicate the results from the above studies into the working environment, especially in Indian settings where every year youth, in large numbers, are entering into the workforce. The study is unique because it studies the role of mindfulness in mitigating stress and increasing psychological well-being at the workplace in Indian settings in both private sector and public sector employees.

The study has found that there is a relation between the factors of mindfulness and perceived stress. Data analysis has shown that there is a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and perceived

stress. This means that little practice of mindfulness can reduce stress at the workplace. This finding is in line with the finding of Maya et al. (2019) and Barnes et al. (2007). Also, the practice of mindfulness has the ability to improve psychological well-being at the workplace which confirms the finding of Coo and Salanova (2018) and Baer et al. (2008).

The study found that there was no statistically significant difference in the total scores of five facets of mindfulness and perceived stress between the private sector and public sector employees. These findings are important since it shows the diminishing gap in the nature of work and effort required in the private sector and public sector jobs. Also, a healthy level of mindfulness among the participants helped them to mitigate their stress and improve psychological well-being.

This study establishes the fact that there is no difference in stress when it comes to the type of job (public sector or private sector). Due to the overall positive effects of mindfulness, this study recommends private and public companies encourage their employees to engage in mindfulness-based programs. Based on the mindfulness scores, it was found that participants scored higher in observing and describing their thoughts but lower in non-reactivity on thoughts. Therefore, mindfulness programs should be designed in a way that focuses on educating employees on not to react to their thoughts and rather respond in a mindful way.

Conclusion

Mental health problems if not addressed in starting can be devastating for an individual. The ability to work and perform at the workplace is a primary thing that gets compromised due to mental health problems. By studying variables of mindfulness and perceived stress in both private and public sector employees, this study highlights the importance of mindfulness in the workplace. Little practice of mindfulness can help employees mitigate stress and improve their psychological well-being. By doing this stress can be avoided to transform into a psychological disorder. If we have to solve workplace-related problems then effective mindfulness-based programs should be designed and employees should be encouraged to participate in them.

Implications

This study will help convince mental health experts and human resource personnel on the urgency to design mindfulness-based training programs and engage employees in them. This will not only mitigate stress but also improve psychological well-being.

Limitations of the study

Factors like, the sample size restricted to only 156 and online collection of data, might have limited the extent to which true feelings of the participants were represented. Therefore, the study suggests that further research should be conducted on larger and more diverse populations.

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