

## **SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL GRANTS BENEFICIARY HOUSEHOLDS: IT'S EFFECT ON FOOD INSECURITY IN THE UMHLATHUZE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, KWAZULU-NATAL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The South African government's focus has been on the accumulating state of household food insecurity that devastates the most disadvantaged groups. The purpose of the study is to establish the effectiveness of social grants in reducing food insecurity within beneficiary households with consideration of the characteristics of the individual responsible for the household. Approximately a third of the South African population and half of the households receive at least one social grant benefit in some provinces. Data was collected from 100 social grants beneficiaries with the aid of a questionnaire and bivariate analysis, which was undertaken to segregate state of food security by socio-demographic characteristics. This study was based on the pilot study of the bigger study in the area to determine the effect of social grants on food insecurity. The findings indicated that households rely on the grants for survival and the causes of food insecurity in the community are far beyond the basic characteristics of the caregiver. This paper proposes that more resources and programmes that encourage self-sufficiency should be made available to these low-income households. The annual increase of state grants should be linked to the cost of a nutritional food basket in South Africa so the beneficiaries can maintain their purchasing powers during times of price inflation and drought

**Keywords:** caregiver, food security, food insecurity, household, social grants, South Africa.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In a democratic South Africa, all people ought to be able to access sufficient food on a daily basis without any shame or perverse obstacles. The Supreme Law duly recognises the human right to food. It is for this reason that the human right to accessing food and feeding themselves, either through domestic food production or store purchases, is legally protected (South African Human Rights Commission, 2016). The right to food is strongly associated with a person's right to life and dignity (Ziegler, 2012). Lack of access to adequate food daily, and in a dignified manner, classifies one as food insecure. South Africa's Constitution is one of just 20 in the world that acknowledges the right to food (Moyo, 2015). Section 27(1) (b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that "everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water." This obligation is extended in section 27(2), according to which "the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights" (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). In instances where an individual or group is deprived of enjoying their right to sufficient food due to circumstances that they are incapable of controlling, the state has a legal obligation to intervene. Constitutionally, it is the legal obligation of the state to proactively engage in means that will strengthen access to necessary resources for humans to feed themselves (Zielger, 2012).

Currently South Africa is confronted with, amongst others, the issue of food insecurity. The country's social grants system plays a pivotal role in tackling these problems that undervalue the right to food. The immediate objective of the Social Assistance Act No. 13 of 2004 as amended is the provision of social grants as government's measure to reduce hunger and poverty amongst those that cannot fully participate in the market. The Social Assistance Act acknowledges an inadequate income and an inability to participate in the market particularly amongst marginalised groups such as the elderly, the disabled and children (Overseas Development Institute, 2006). The social grants are therefore intended to improve regular access to food for those deemed most vulnerable. Overall, seven main grants are distributed under the existing system namely; old age grant for pensioners over 60, disability grant, care dependency grant, foster care grant, child support grant, grant in aid and war veterans grant (South African Social Security Agency, 2016). The child support and the old age grants for many households are the only form of reliable source income (Byaruhanga et al., 2017). The social grants system has massively expanded since 1994 and some praise may be acceptable after the slight increase in payments of all state grants for all 17 million beneficiaries as announced in the 2017 national budget (Devereux, 2017).

In theory, an increase in the value of the state grants should amount to improvements in the indicators of food insecurity nationally. An increase in income ideally should amount to more money available to spend on food, diversification of diets and an increase in the number of daily meals in households. Currently, social grants support reaches almost a third of South Africans and more than half of households benefit from at least one grant in some provinces (Brand SA, 2014). The tragedy, however, is the grim reality that despite the Constitutional right to food and the existence of accumulating government social grants, food insecurity in South African is still a problem (Devereux, 2017). Though a sizeable share of grant income may be devoted to food, most beneficiary households are food insecure. This simply means that the social grants provided are clearly not enough to stave off food shortages and its far-reaching effects (Roberts et al., 2017). The minor annual increases in social grants income do not essentially change the present state of affairs. Devereux (2017) acknowledged that grant income is inadequate for the provision of food to support most households. The grants nonetheless matter and still make an impact, as they not only support the recipients or beneficiaries but all household members in most instances. Byaruhanga et al. (2017) anecdotal research evidence indicates that vulnerable non-grant beneficiary children experience extended bouts of hunger compared to those that receive grants.

## **PREDICTIVE VARIABLES OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY**

This study has settled on a bivariate data analysis model that contains socio-demographic characteristics of caregivers as predictors of household food security. In this section, existing local and international literature is reviewed to derive an understanding as to how socio-demographic factors affect the state of household food security. Literature suggests that socio-demographic characteristics of the household caregivers are expected to have an impact on the state of food insecurity within a household. These characteristics either could positively or negatively affect the household's ability to take well-informed decisions that enhance its capacity to secure sufficient food. This study has adopted disparities in caregivers' age, gender, level of education, employment status and marital status as predictors of food insecurity in social grant beneficiary households. It is therefore suggested that these variables may or may not expose differences in the state of food insecurity within grant beneficiary households. Below is an elaboration on the selected variables:

Age of household caregiver, in the context of Bashir et al. (2012), can have a strong correlation with food security. The expected effect of age on food security could be positive or negative. On a positive note, an increase in the age of the household caregiver decreases the likelihood of household food insecurity. The assumption is that the household's knowledge of food security-related matters improves when the head is older and more experienced (Mango et al., 2014). Furthermore, Abu & Soom (2016) argue otherwise, indicating that households cared for by the elderly become more reliant on gifts, remittances and grants while at the same time they become less productive with age. Old age is expected to have a negative impact on the ability to seek and obtain employment that could increase household income. Education status of a caregiver is a social capital that can positively affect a household's capacity to engage in well-informed household management and food decisions that lower the risk of food insecurity (Mutisya et al., 2016). According to Bhorat et al. (2016), educated household heads have the capacity to increase their productive abilities, as they are most likely to attain better financial resources.

According to Sida (2015), food security, good nutrition and the gender of a caregiver are closely linked. This often results from females being systematically denied rights to property, decent employment, education and good health. Nonetheless, poor households led by women are usually successful in accessing food for the children and general household members in contrast to those led by males. This is because women, particularly in developing countries, play a significant role in ensuring household access to food. It should however be noted that regardless of their contribution to food security, women constitute the most part as far as socially and economically disempowered groups in society are concerned (Sharaunga et., 2016).

Employment status of caregiver is expected to have an impact on household food security status. Willingness of the caregiver to work and their inability to find employment can have a negative effect on their capacity to purchase basic goods and providing adequate care to their families. This suggests that unemployed caregivers cannot fulfil necessities such as food, thus supporting the supposition that unemployment has a negative effect on food security. Regarding the marital status of caregiver, food insecurity is commonly associated with households cared for by the unmarried. The expected difference is that single caregivers may lack support structures and the general household is likely to depend on the income of one adult (Wang & Qiu, 2016).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs primary quantitative data obtained from 100 respondents located within the four Traditional Authorities (TA's) of uMhlathuze local municipality. Purposeful study design was used whereby twenty-five households (25) were selected in each TA and only one person (the caregiver) from each household were available during the survey. The selected persons had to be responsible for the household, knowledgeable about the general household access to grants and the manner in which those grants are utilised. The English version of the research instrument was translated into *isiZulu*, the official language of the community where study was administered or the preferred language of the respondents. This was to ensure that the respondents fully understood the questionnaire. This report was based on the pilot study of the bigger study in the area to determine the effect of social grants on food insecurity.

The questionnaire included, among others, two questions that investigated the sustainability of food security and the importance of social grants for the welfare of the household. Specifically, the household caregivers were asked: "In the last 30 days, did your

household run out of food or was forced to seek out alternative ways of saving the little there is?” The second question deals with the perceived necessity of social grants by the household caregivers. The specific phrasing of the question: “Would your household survive should the provision of Social Grants cease?” Responses to both questions were captured using a two-point scale with coded options labelled as either “Yes” or “No”. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution tables and graphs were used to display quantitative findings. These were helpful in illustrating the state of food security within grant beneficiary households with due consideration of the characteristics of caregivers.

**Study limitations**

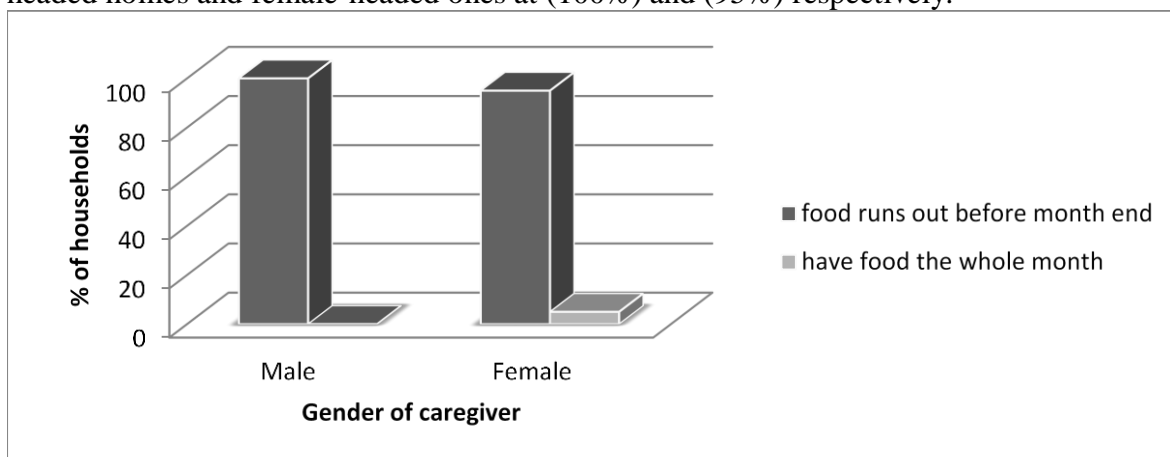
As indicated earlier, the purpose of the study is to establish the effectiveness of social grants in reducing food insecurity within beneficiary households with consideration of the characteristics of the individual responsible for the household. According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2019), estimates of the national population count to be at 58, 8 million. A Statistical Summary of social grants in South Africa presented by the Department of Social Developments indicated that in the year 2018, a total of 17, 73 million citizens received a social grant. Considering the large number of South Africans who receive a social grant, it is difficult to fully generalise the results based on the 100 respondents that were included in the study. Nonetheless, that does not undermine the value of the research findings. This limitation does not disqualify the experiences put forth by the sampled grant beneficiary households; they will give the reader an understanding of the status quo within these households and whether social grants are benefiting the poor as intended by the state.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Below is a comprehensive discussion of findings through tables and figures, the state of household food insecurity is discussed relative to the characteristics of the respondents who were the caregivers.

***Gender Aspect of Household Food Security***

Figure1 illustrates that there is a very small variation between reported food insecurity of male-headed homes and female-headed ones at (100%) and (95%) respectively.



**Figure 1 Gender aspect of household food security (%)**

Within uMhlathuze, the proportion of female-led households that have food the whole month is not sufficient to categorise female-led households as generally well off. Both male- and female-led grant beneficiary households are less likely to achieve sustainable access to food on a daily basis. All male-led households are food insecure compared to a meagre 5% of female-led households. Variations in food security is by small margins in favour of female caregivers. Nonetheless, gender, in this case, cannot be sufficiently considered a contributing factor to household food insecurity. This is comparable to popular findings that associate food security with gender. For instance, the High-Level Panel of Experts (2012) argue that social transfers that target women are more likely to realise a better impact on food security in contrast to targeting men.

### *Age of Caregiver and Household Food Security*

Majority (53%) of households were headed by caregivers between the ages of 40-46 and then caregivers who are 65 years and above (46%) as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Age of Caregiver and Household Food Security (Col. %)**

	<b>19-39yrs</b>	<b>40-64yrs</b>	<b>≥65yrs</b>
<b>Number of Cases (% row)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>46</b>
Household runs out of food before the month ends	100	98	95
Household has food the whole month	0	2	5

uMhlathuze has a very small proportion (1%) of grant beneficiary households led by those younger than 40. This small share nonetheless reports that the household runs out of food prior to the end of the month, hence, one has to seek alternative means for survival. A maximum share of 98% and 95% of caregivers older than 40 but less than 65 years and those older than 65 years indicated that their households' food sources are depleted prior to the end of the month and have to seek alternative means of securing food. Sustained accessibility to food is minimal and varies by a slight margin at 2% and 5% for those between 40-64 and ≥65 respectively.

Proportion of households led by those below 40 years was small and may be classified as statistically inadequate for generalising findings to the larger community. Nonetheless, household food insecurity is noticeable for a household cared for by those younger but slightly improves as the age of the caregiver increases. Findings illustrate that uMhlathuze grant beneficiary households' food inadequacy cannot be confidently associated with the age of the caregiver. The share of those who have food the whole month is small nonetheless varies by small margins with increase in age. This age-related outcome is consistent with research findings of a comparable study by (Zhou et al., 2017) in that households managed by those ≥65 are less food insecure, as they have greater knowledge and involvement in social settings and domestic farming.

### *Education Level of Caregiver and Household Food Security*

Most (48%) caregivers had a minimum education level of grade 8 to grade 12 while almost a fifth (19%) had not attained formal education.



**Table 2: Education Level of Caregiver and Household Food Security (Col. %)**

	<b>No Formal Education</b>	<b>Grade 1-7</b>	<b>Grade 8-12</b>	<b>Tertiary Education</b>
<b>Number of Cases (Row)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>9</b>
Household runs out of food before the month ends	100	87	100	100
Household has food the whole month	0	13	0	0

Virtually a quarter (24%) of caregivers have at least first grade education and were not educated beyond the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The smallest share (9%) of caregivers have obtained tertiary education. All the household caregivers (100%), whether one had no formal education with Grade 8-12 or tertiary education, reported that their households run of food and at some stage have to seek other means of securing food. Merely (13%) of households led by caregivers with Grade 1-7 education have sustainable access to food.

Although high education attainment was normally linked to better food security opportunities and vice versa, findings presented in (Table 2) indicate that there is no relationship between the level of education of a caregiver and the sustained household access to food. All households, except for the (13%) cared for by respondents not educated beyond the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, are food secure. All the others, regardless of the caregiver's level of education are equally susceptible to problems of food shortages before the month ends. Education of the person who is caring for the household is an important factor that influences household food security. It is necessary to sufficiently meet needs and maintain the wellbeing of a household (Dimitri et al., 2015). However, at uMhlathuze, the level of educational attainment of the caregiver does not influence food security amongst grant beneficiary households.

### ***Caregiver Employment Status and Household Food Security***

Secure and decent employment is necessary to achieve household food security. Employment of a caregiver should play a significant role by serving as a channel of securing sufficient food on a regular basis.

**Table 3: Caregiver Employment Status and Household Food Security (Col. %)**

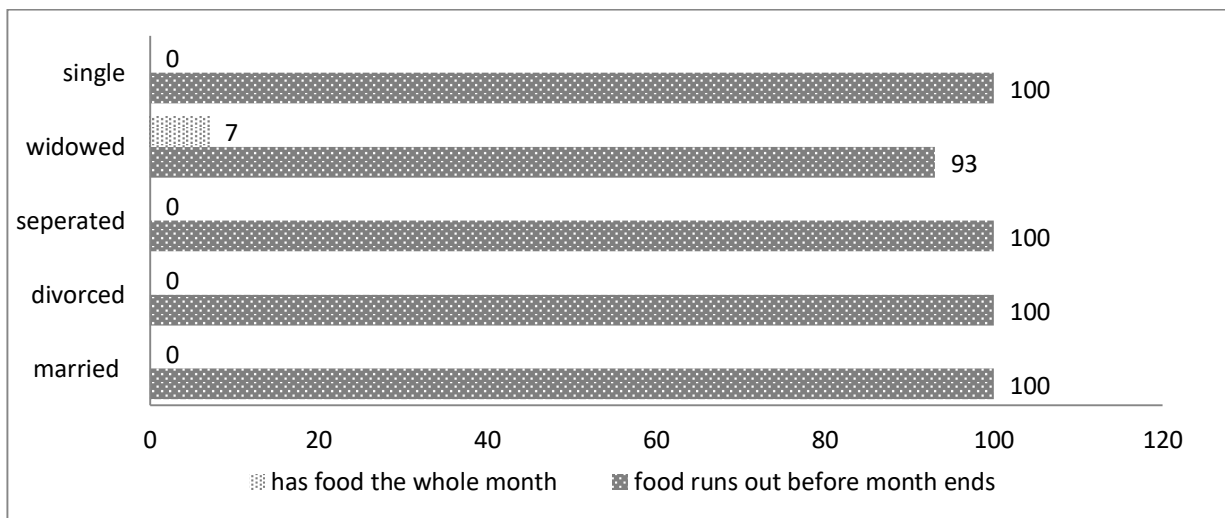
	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>
<b>Total Number of Cases (Row)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>75</b>
Household runs out of food before the month ends	96	97
Household has food the whole month	4	3

Table 3 shows a substantial gap in the employment status of caregivers and food security. A sizeable difference exists between the number of employed (25%) and the unemployed (75%). This is evidence of a high unemployment rate amongst caregivers in uMhlathuze. However, the findings in Table 3 also indicate that there was no significant difference between the households of the employed and the unemployed as far as household food security is concerned. This finding suggests that households led by the employed are food insecure because they accumulate insufficient income from their employment. These households similarly to those cared for by the unemployed have limited mechanisms for

dealing with the various risks that they face, including satisfying basic needs such as procuring adequate food.

***Marital Status of a Caregiver and Household Food Security***

Food insecurity is associated with households cared for by the single (e.g. unmarried, widowed, separated and divorced). The anticipated variation by marital status is attributed to the lack of support from a spouse. The single lack support structures and the general household is likely to depend on the income of one adult (Wang & Qiu, 2016). The relationship between marital status and food security was investigated by using marital status as a unit of analysis in achieving sustainable access to food for households.



**Figure 2: Marital Status of a Caregiver and Household Food Security (%)**

Figure 2 shows that the marital status of caregivers does not translate into food security for households. The small proportion (7%) that is food secure are those cared for by the widowed while those led by the married and the single are as equally food insecure.

***Average Monthly Household Income and Food Expenditure***

The total average household monthly income (inclusive of grants and other sources) was R4317.54 The average household income derived only from other income sources such as employment, irregular work, running small business etc. is R 3 025.54 monthly. An estimated average of R1078.5 was indicated as a maximum amount for each household per month when spending on food.

**Table 4: Average Monthly Household Income and Food Expenditure**

	<b>Rand Value</b>	<b>Income %</b>
<b>Total (Average from All Sources)</b>	<b>4317.54</b>	100
Average household income from other sources (e.g. employment, irregular work, running a small business etc.)	3040.54	70
Average household income from grants only	1 277.00	30
<b>Average monthly income expenditure on food</b>	<b>1078.5</b>	<b>25</b>

The amount spent on food by households of uMhlathuze was almost similar to the total average value (R1277) of the grant income that was indicated in Table 4. This means that social grants income was depleted after financing household food that runs out prior to the end of the month. The reality of households not being able to spend more on food can result in the adoption of unsustainable coping strategies when households run out of food, particularly for those households that solely rely on social grants for income.

### ***Social Grants Characteristics uMhlathuze***

Table 5 indicates that most households (36%) benefit from a combination of two social grants on average which were predominantly old age grants (OAG) and child support grants (CSG).

**Table 5: Social Grants Characteristics uMhlathuze (Row %)**

Average number of different grant types per household	2
Households receiving OAG only	20
Households receiving CSG only	31
Households receiving foster care (FC)	11
Household receiving disability grants (DG)	2
Households receiving a combination of grants (OAG & CSG)	36
Average number of household members	5.8 (N)

A 2015 correlation study conducted by Stats SA suggested that a shared contribution of OAG and CSG to household income has a positive correlation with food security. The study further suggested that the correlation would be lower if households had no other means of generating income. In the case of uMhlathuze, results show that a joint contribution of social grants has no significant effect on food security, as the majority of households are only dependant on social grants with no other means or sources of income.

It has already been establishing that there was a high unemployment rate specifically amongst caregivers. The high unemployment was a cause for concern as this issue contributes to food insecurity for the already disadvantaged households that have taken steps to seek employment to no avail. Also notable is the large average number of household members (5.8). The Stats SA (2014/15) Living Conditions Survey (LCS) indicated that household income increases along with an increase in the household size but ultimately declines when the number of household members reaches five or more. The income decline according to the LCS can be attributed to larger households being heavily reliant on pensions, grants and other family allowances to supplement monthly income. Furthermore, non-poor households are commonly composed of 3.2 members on average (General Household Survey GHS, 2011). Based on the statistical findings of the study, social grant households at uMhlathuze could be categorised as poor and reliant on state grants for their livelihood.

### ***Importance of Social Grants for Household Survival***

As depicted in Table 6, the majority of respondents (61%) or households reported that they would not survive without social grants while (39%) indicated that they would survive should the grants cease.



**Table 6: Importance of Social Grants for Household Survival (Row %)**

<b>Would your Household Survive Should Provision of Social Grants Cease?</b>	
Household would survive should grants cease	<b>39</b>
Household would not survive should grants cease	<b>61</b>

This simply means that the majority of households in uMhlathuze were very dependent on social grants to sustain their livelihoods, as it is the main source of income for most households.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Findings do not suggest a variation in degree of food insecurity on the basis of socio-demographic characteristics of household caregivers. This means within the social grant beneficiary households, the progression of food insecurity does not reduce or grow on account of these variables. All variables such as caregiver's marital status, level of education, employment status, gender or age have no effect on general household food security. All households are generally affected by food shortages irrespective of wide-ranging state interventions including social grants. In theory, the expanding coverage and increasing value of the social grants should improve food security indicators, however, findings indicate otherwise. With the provision of grants, households are expected to have the financial capacity to spend more on food for the household, thus increasing the daily number of meals. In reality, access to grants does not necessarily get rid of food insecurity but affords households with sustainable means of escaping food destitution and hunger.

The annual minor increases in the value of state grants are not essentially removing household food insecurity. Caregivers leading these low-income households are forced to respond to food shortages by adopting a range of unsustainable coping strategies. Regardless of spending a considerable proportion of household income on food, caregivers find themselves in positions that compel them to secure more food through alternative means such as monetary or food loans from neighbours and relatives. Caregivers also mentioned reducing meal portions or, in severe cases, omission of meals by certain members of the household as amongst the strategies adopted. A General Household survey by Stats SA portrays this as common amongst poor households experiencing food shortages for at least five days every month (Tsegay, 2014).

The state of food security within uMhlathuze social grants beneficiary households is very concerning. It would be an error to settle for the notion that social grants are not having any positive impact as far as beneficiaries and their households are concerned. Without the benefit of social grants, these households would be poor and destitute particularly those with no other form of income. Regardless of the fact that social grants are not sufficient for households to afford to buy sufficient food in both quantity and quality, it still remains an important tool in the fight to reduce hunger in poor households. Grants inadequacy for food security, even with the annual minor increases in their value, can be attributed to two important reasons. The first and most commonly identifiable amongst beneficiary households is that the value of the grants is small. The grants are thinly spread to support the many people in households and not solely the legal beneficiary. The second cause of food insecurity is multifactorial and complex as such would necessitate a wide-ranging array of intervention that goes beyond the provision of financial grants to prevent individual and household food insecurity.

### In Terms of Recommendations:

- The state should acknowledge that the social grants income is pooled to support the general household and is not solely used for the purchase of food.
- The state and development agencies should consider supplementing social grants support with more sustainable food security programmes such as investing in education and in agricultural infrastructure for domestic food production. With these programmes, households will be self-reliant with sustainable means of accessing adequate food, diversified diets and an increase in the number of daily meals. The annual increase of state grants should be linked to the cost of a nutritional food basket in South Africa so that the beneficiaries can maintain their purchasing powers during times of price inflation and drought.

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