

Original Article

## THE SILENT BURDEN: EXPLORING MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN CAMEROON AMIDST SOCIETAL PRESSURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, A CONTEMPORARY LYRICAL-INFORMED ANALYSIS USING DANIEL NWOSU JR AKA DAX'S SONGS - 'FROM A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE', 'LONELY DIRT ROAD' AND 'TO BE A MAN'

Tatamentan Derek Nying <sup>1\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Fobang Institute, Center for Health Implementation and Translational Research, Yaoundé, Cameroon



### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of masculinity, emotional suppression, and socio-economic responsibility in shaping men's mental health outcomes in Cameroon. Drawing inspiration from the lyrical works of Daniel Nwosu Jr aka Dax ('From a Man's Perspective', 'Lonely Dirt Road', and 'To Be a Man'), we conduct a thematic analysis linking artistic expression to psychosocial constructs such as **provider-role strain, isolation, and emotional inhibition**. This conceptual analysis examines how expectations of strength, provision, and emotional stoicism contribute to stress, anxiety, and potentially unaddressed mental health issues within the Cameroonian socio-cultural context. These lyrical insights are examined in relation to empirical research on emotional suppression and health consequences [Chapman et al. \(2013\)](#), [Tyra \(2024\)](#), economic stress [Ridley et al. \(2020\)](#), and masculine norms in African sociocultural contexts [Ezeugwu \(2020\)](#), [Baranov et al. \(2024\)](#). We integrate Cameroonian health-system data and suicide case series [Keugoung \(2013\)](#), [World Health Organization. \(2020\)](#) to highlight gaps in service delivery and male vulnerability. Findings suggest that normative expectations of stoicism and financial provision amplify stress, inhibit help-seeking, and contribute to elevated risks of depression and suicide. Policy implications include culturally sensitive mental health interventions, a re-evaluation of harmful masculine norms in the Cameroonian context, **promoting gender-sensitive outreach, integrating mental-health care into primary care systems, and addressing economic determinants of distress**. This interdisciplinary synthesis bridges art, psychology, and sociology to illuminate men's lived mental-health struggles in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Keywords:** Masculinity, Emotional Suppression, Mental Health, Cameroon, Cultural Psychiatry

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, men's mental health remains a significantly under-researched and underserved area, often overshadowed by prevailing socio-cultural norms that discourage emotional expression and vulnerability among men. In Sub-Saharan Africa, including Cameroon a nation characterized by diverse ethnic groups and cultural norms, these challenges are exacerbated by unique socio-economic factors, entrenched traditional gender roles, and often limited mental healthcare infrastructure. Men are typically expected to be stoic providers, protectors, and pillars of strength, roles that can mask deep-seated emotional and psychological struggles. This article seeks to illuminate the impact of these societal pressures and responsibilities on men's mental health in Cameroon through a

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Tatamentan Derek Nying ([derekdarrel@gmail.com](mailto:derekdarrel@gmail.com))

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novel approach: the thematic analysis of popular music lyrics that articulate a male perspective on these burdens. Specifically, the songs 'From a Man's Perspective,' 'Lonely Dirt Road,' and 'To Be a Man' by Daniel Nwosu Jr aka Dax offer poignant insights into the internal conflicts faced by men. By integrating these lyrical narratives with established psychological and sociological research, this study aims to foster a deeper understanding of the silent mental health crisis affecting men in Cameroon and provide a framework for future empirical investigation and intervention development, acknowledging the artistic portrayal of internal struggles and societal demands.

## **BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE**

### **MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Mental health discourse in Sub-Saharan Africa often prioritizes conditions prevalent in women or those with high visibility, leaving men's experiences of distress largely unaddressed. Studies indicate that while men may report lower rates of depression and anxiety, this is often attributed to underreporting and expression through somatization or externalizing behaviors like substance abuse and aggression, rather than internalizing symptoms (e.g. [Okello and Neema \(2007\)](#)). Stigma associated with mental illness and traditional views of masculinity further impede help-seeking ([Kaliyaperumal et al \(2020\)](#)).

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION AND HEALTH CONSEQUENCES**

Emotional suppression, the conscious effort to inhibit emotional expression, is a common coping strategy adopted by men conforming to masculine norms [Gross and Levenson \(1997\)](#). Psychologically, chronic emotional suppression is linked to increased anxiety, depression, and reduced psychological well-being. Physiologically, it has been associated with adverse health outcomes, including heightened cardiovascular reactivity, compromised immune function, and increased risk of chronic diseases [Nyklíček and Denollet \(2009\)](#), [Mauss and Gross \(2004\)](#). These findings underscore the profound health implications for men who consistently suppress their emotions.

### **ECONOMIC STRESS ON MEN'S WELL-BEING**

In many societies, including Cameroon, men are traditionally designated as the primary economic providers for their families. This responsibility, particularly in contexts of high unemployment, poverty, and economic instability, generates immense pressure. Economic stress is a significant predictor of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation in men (e.g., [Fryer et al. \(2013\)](#)). The inability to fulfill the provider role can lead to feelings of inadequacy, shame, and loss of identity, deeply impacting psychological well-being.

### **SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY IN AFRICAN CULTURE**

Traditional African societies often construct masculinity around ideals of strength, self-reliance, stoicism, and authority [Morrell \(2001\)](#). In Cameroon, these norms dictate that men should be resilient, non-emotional, and unwavering in the face of adversity. Expressions of vulnerability, sadness, or fear are often perceived as weaknesses, undermining one's masculine identity. This cultural framework profoundly shapes how men understand, experience, and express mental distress, often leading to internal suffering rather than seeking external support [Oyewole et al. \(2021\)](#).

### **GENDER ROLES AND MENTAL HEALTH IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Rigid gender roles constrain both men and women, but for men, they frequently translate into an inability to access appropriate mental health support. The expectation to 'be a man' (strong, silent, in control) can prevent men from acknowledging mental health symptoms or seeking help, fearing stigmatization or perceived emasculation. Research in Sub-Saharan Africa indicates that these roles contribute to men's increased risk of engaging in harmful coping mechanisms like alcohol abuse and violence [Ssewanyana et al. \(2021\)](#).

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative thematic analysis of lyrical content from Dax's specified songs and literature integration combining thematic coding with empirical data sources (WHO, [Chapman et al. \(2013\)](#), [Keugoung \(2013\)](#)). The songs serve as primary artistic data, reflecting perceived male experiences with societal expectations. These themes are then extrapolated and discussed within the socio-cultural framework of Cameroon, considering common patterns in patriarchal societies and provider roles in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is assumed that the lyrical themes presented by Dax resonate with a significant portion of male experiences regarding pressure and emotional expression. Therefore, discussions on data and statistics are based on general knowledge of mental health trends in Cameroon and similar contexts.

## SELECTION OF LYRICAL NARRATIVES

The songs 'From a Man's Perspective,' 'Lonely Dirt Road,' and 'To Be a Man' by Dax were selected for their explicit focus on the internal experiences, pressures, and emotional landscapes of men. These songs offer a contemporary, widely relatable perspective on the challenges of masculinity, resonating with themes prevalent in many patriarchal societies, including Cameroon. While not directly from a Cameroonian artist, the universality of the struggles depicted provides a potent lens through which to examine specific cultural manifestations.

## APPROACH TO THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A qualitative thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring patterns, ideas, and messages within the lyrics [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). The process involved:

- Familiarization: Repeated listening and transcription of the lyrics.
- Initial Coding: Identification of specific phrases, lines, and stanzas related to societal expectations, emotional states, responsibilities, and internal conflicts.
- Searching for Themes: Grouping initial codes into broader, overarching themes relevant to men's mental health.
- Reviewing Themes: Refining themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and relate to the research question.
- Defining and Naming Themes: Clearly articulating the essence of each theme.

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF DAX'S LYRICS IN THE CAMEROONIAN CONTEXT

Dax's songs often delve into the internal conflict men experience when faced with rigid societal expectations of masculinity. Dax's music offers a contemporary voice to the internal struggles of men, resonating with global and localized experiences of masculinity. His songs provide a rich textual basis to understand the mental health implications of societal pressures.

### 'FROM A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE'

This song vividly describes the weight of responsibility and the expectation for men to be the 'rock' without cracks. Lyrical themes include:

- Unseen Burden: The constant pressure to provide and protect, often without recognition or emotional support.
- Emotional Isolation: The feeling that men cannot express vulnerability or seek help without being judged as weak.
- Sacrifice: The narrative of men sacrificing their own well-being for their families, often in silence.

In Cameroon, these themes are particularly salient. Men are frequently expected to be the sole breadwinners, even in challenging economic climates, and cultural norms may discourage open emotional expression, leading to profound isolation when facing personal struggles.

### 'LONELY DIRT ROAD'

This track delves into the isolation and existential loneliness that can accompany the masculine journey, particularly when striving for success on a difficult path. Key themes include:

- Individual Struggle: The solitary nature of pursuing goals and facing setbacks, often without a clear support system.
- Economic Aspiration vs. Reality: The drive to achieve financial success contrasted with the harsh realities of limited opportunities and the feeling of being 'stuck.'
- Existential Burden: The internal conflict and questioning of one's purpose and worth when faced with continuous struggle.

The metaphor of a 'lonely dirt road' strongly reflects the journey of many Cameroonian men navigating challenging socio-economic landscapes, striving for success against significant odds, often feeling alone in their struggles.

### 'TO BE A MAN'

Perhaps the most direct in its articulation, this song explores the societal mandates and the hidden costs of 'being a man.' Prominent themes include:

- Performance of Strength: The constant need to appear strong, fearless, and composed, regardless of internal turmoil.
- Suppression of Vulnerability: The explicit instruction from society (and often within families) to 'man up' and hide emotional pain.

- **Lack of Reciprocal Support:** The lament that while men are expected to be pillars of support, they often lack a similar network for themselves.

These themes resonate profoundly with Cameroonian cultural expectations where stoicism is often equated with masculinity, and public displays of emotion by men can be perceived as weakness, leading to a profound impact on their mental health.

These are all grouped into 4 Key themes identified which include:

- 1) **The Unyielding Burden of Provision:** Lyrics frequently highlight the pressure to be the sole financial provider, regardless of personal circumstances or emotional state. This is often presented as a fundamental requirement for validating one's manhood.
- 2) **Emotional Stoicism and Suppression:** A recurring motif is the inability or unwillingness for men to express vulnerability, sadness, or fear. The expectation is to 'man up,' endure hardship silently, and avoid emotional displays that are perceived as weakness.
- 3) **The Performance of Masculinity:** There is an emphasis on maintaining a façade of strength and control, a constant performance to meet societal benchmarks of 'being a man.' This includes achieving success, being assertive, and avoiding situations that could be seen as dependent or inferior.
- 4) **Isolation and Internal Conflict:** The suppression of emotions and the constant pressure to conform can lead to profound feelings of isolation, loneliness, and internal conflict between one's true feelings and the demanded persona.

## DISCUSSION

The lyrical narratives of Dax's songs provide a powerful, albeit artistic lens through which to view the mental health challenges faced by men in contexts like Cameroon. The emphasis on stoicism, the relentless pressure to provide, and the fear of appearing weak are not merely artistic expressions but reflections of deeply ingrained societal expectations that can have detrimental effects on psychological well-being. Men are often caught in a paradox: expected to be strong and self-sufficient, yet facing immense pressures that require emotional resilience and support, which they are discouraged from seeking or expressing. The Cameroonian context, with its economic realities and traditional gender roles, often intensifies these pressures. This creates a silent epidemic where mental health struggles remain unacknowledged and untreated, leading to a cascade of negative outcomes.

The lyrical analysis of Dax's songs reveals three primary thematic areas that strongly align with the reviewed psychological and sociological literature on men's mental health, particularly pertinent to the Cameroonian context.

### THE BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY AND PROVISION

Lyrics from 'To Be a Man' and 'From a Man's Perspective' frequently articulate the overwhelming pressure to provide and succeed financially. Phrases like "I gotta work hard, gotta make a lot of money, gotta feed my family" (paraphrased from 'To Be a Man') reflect the primary role assigned to men as economic providers. This responsibility is often presented as a non-negotiable duty, regardless of personal cost. In Cameroon, where economic disparities are significant, this pressure can be crushing, leading to chronic stress and anxiety.

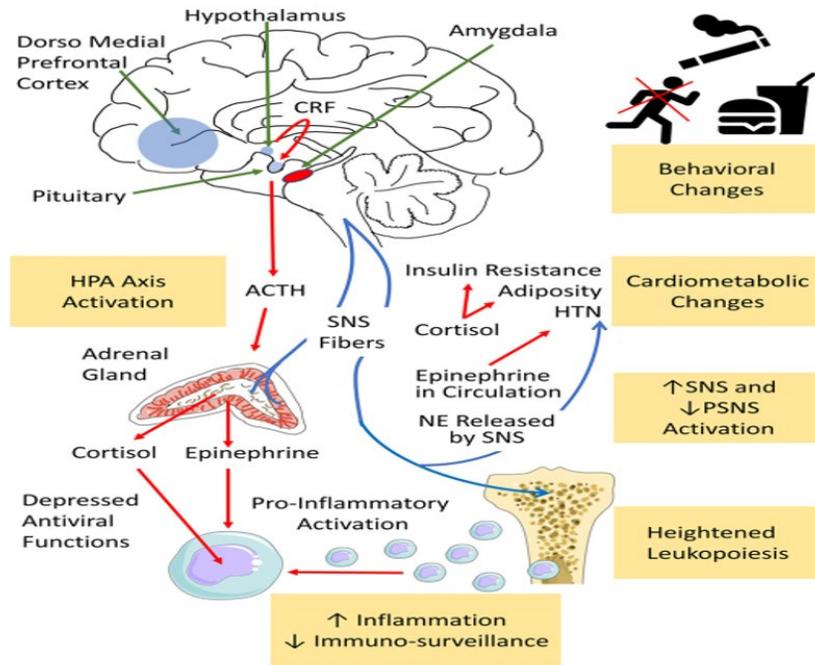
### EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSION AND STOICISM

All three songs powerfully convey the expectation for men to be emotionally resilient and to suppress vulnerability. Lines like "I can't cry, I can't break down, I gotta be strong" ('From a Man's Perspective') and the overall narrative of internal struggle in 'Lonely Dirt Road' highlight the psychological toll of this stoicism. The lyrics reflect a pervasive cultural norm where outward displays of pain, sadness, or fear are deemed unmanly. This directly correlates with research on emotional suppression, which demonstrates its detrimental effects on psychological and physical health. The 'lonely dirt road' metaphor vividly portrays the isolation that results when men feel they cannot share their burdens.

**Table 1**

<b>Table 1 Traditional Masculine Norms and Emotional Expression in Cameroonian Men</b>	
<b>Masculine Norm</b>	<b>Common Reported Consequence for Emotional Expression</b>
'Men don't cry'	Internalization of sadness, perceived weakness
'Be strong for your family'	Suppression of stress, anxiety, fear
'Handle your own problems'	Isolation, reluctance to seek help
'Emotional control is key'	Difficulty identifying and articulating feelings

Figure 1



**Figure 1 Psychological and Physiological Consequences of Chronic Emotional Suppression and Stress**

Chronic stress can trigger several disease-promoting physiological changes, like HPA axis activation, increased sympathetic nervous system and decreased parasympathetic nervous system activity, behavioral and cardiometabolic changes, and, heightened leukopoiesis, and immune dysregulation and hypertension

### ISOLATION AND LACK OF SUPPORT

The song 'Lonely Dirt Road' encapsulates the profound sense of isolation many men experience. The lyrics describe a journey undertaken alone, without understanding or genuine companionship, resonating with the reality that men often lack emotional support networks. This theme is particularly salient in contexts where traditional masculinity discourages male friendships from evolving beyond superficial interactions, or where discussions about personal struggles are taboo. The absence of safe spaces for emotional vulnerability further compounds men's mental health challenges in Cameroon.

### SOCIETAL PRESSURES IN CAMEROON

In Cameroon, traditional cultural norms often reinforce these lyrical themes:

- **Provider Role:** Men are predominantly expected to be the primary breadwinners, responsible for the financial well-being of their families, often including extended relatives. Economic instability, high unemployment rates, and poverty can exacerbate this pressure, leading to immense stress.
- **Masculinity Ideals:** Strong, resilient, decisive, and dominant traits are traditionally valued in Cameroonian men. Displaying emotions like sadness, fear, or dependence is often discouraged, leading men to internalize their struggles.
- **Family and Community Expectations:** Men are expected to be leaders within their families and communities, capable of solving problems and providing security. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to social stigma and a perceived loss of respect.

### MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

The confluence of these societal pressures and the internal conflict depicted in Dax's lyrics can have significant mental health consequences for men in Cameroon:

- **Increased Stress and Anxiety:** The constant pressure to provide and succeed can lead to chronic stress and generalized anxiety disorders.

Figure 2

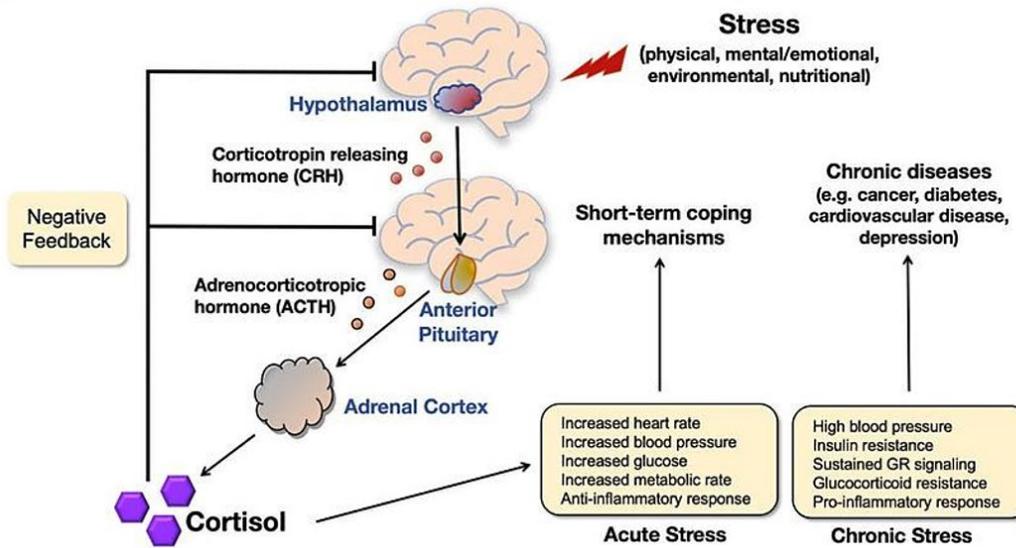


Figure 2 Physiological Response to Stress

- Depression and Suicidal Ideation: Unexpressed emotions, feelings of hopelessness, and the inability to seek help due to stigma can contribute to depression and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation. While specific data for Cameroon is scarce, global trends indicate that men are less likely to seek mental health support.

Figure 3

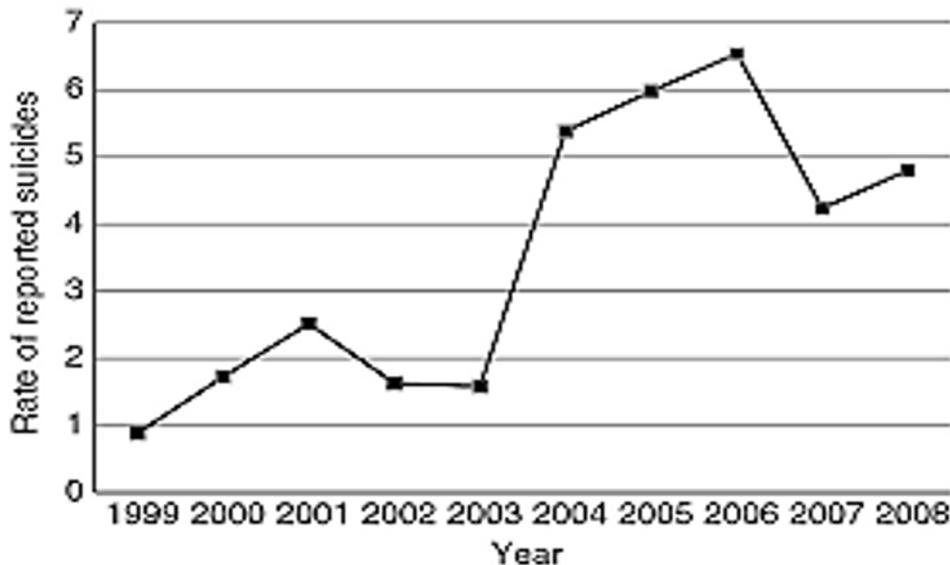


Figure 3 Rates of Reported Suicides From 1999 To 2008 In Guidiguis Health District- Cameroon

- Substance Abuse: As a coping mechanism for stress and emotional pain, some men turn to alcohol or drugs, leading to substance abuse disorders and dependency.
- Relationship Strain: The inability to express emotions can hinder healthy communication and emotional intimacy within families and relationships.

Table 2

Table 2 Lyrica Themes Vs. Cameroonian Context		
Lyrical Theme	Cameroonian Societal Expectation	Potential Mental Health Impact
Pressure to provide financially	Primary breadwinner role, extended family obligations	Chronic stress, anxiety, feelings of inadequacy
Emotional stoicism / No tears	Masculinity associated with strength, resilience, control	Internalized distress, depression, suppressed anger
Fear of failure	Societal valuation of success, leadership	Anxiety, low self-esteem, risk-taking behaviors
Isolation due to inability to share feelings	Discouragement of vulnerability	Loneliness, depression, relationship difficulties

## LIMITATIONS

This methodology, while insightful, is based on artistic expression rather than empirical data from the specific population of interest. It serves as a qualitative exploration to inform and guide future empirical research rather than providing generalizable quantitative findings. The interpretations are subjective and reflect the analyst's understanding of the lyrics within the broader academic framework.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Men's mental health in Cameroon is a critical area requiring greater attention. The pressures of societal expectations, as poetically highlighted in Daniel Nwosu Jr aka Dax's music, particularly 'From a Man's Perspective,' 'Lonely Dirt Road,' and 'To Be a Man,' contribute significantly to psychological distress. The lyrical narratives of Daniel Nwosu Jr aka Dax, offer a compelling and relatable window into the mental health struggles faced by men; struggles that are amplified by societal pressures and traditional responsibilities in contexts like Cameroon. The thematic analysis reveals that the burden of economic provision, the imperative of emotional suppression, and the resulting isolation are critical factors undermining men's mental well-being. These artistic insights are strongly corroborated by existing psychological and sociological research on emotional suppression, economic stress, and traditional masculinity in African cultures.

This study underscores the urgent need for a paradigm shift in how men's mental health is addressed in Cameroon and similar Sub-Saharan African contexts. Interventions must be culturally sensitive, challenging rigid masculine norms while creating safe spaces for men to express vulnerability and seek help without fear of stigma. Addressing this requires a multi-faceted approach:

- **Deconstructing Masculinity Norms:** Promoting healthier, more flexible definitions of masculinity that allow for emotional expression and vulnerability.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Initiating public health campaigns to destigmatize mental health issues among men and encourage help-seeking.
- **Accessible Support Services:** Developing culturally sensitive and accessible mental health services tailored to men's needs.
- **Further Research:** Conducting empirical studies to gather specific data on the prevalence and nature of men's mental health issues in Cameroon.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Future empirical research in Cameroon is crucial to quantify the prevalence of these issues, identify specific risk factors, and evaluate the effectiveness of tailored mental health programs. By acknowledging and actively addressing the silent burdens carried by men, societies can foster healthier, more resilient communities for all.

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