

## **FAMILY LIFE QUALITY AND ADOLESCENT ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR: THE ROLE OF PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS IN CRIMINAL AETIOLOGY**

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### **Abstract**

The research aim was to examine the role of family life quality in the aetiology of antisocial behaviour. A multidimensional nine-part questionnaire was implemented during 2015 with 1300 participants aged 15-16 (N=799, 60%) and 17-18 (N=496, 40%) in Croatia. Boys reported higher delinquent behaviour ( $p<.001$ ), antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $p<.001$ ) and parental approval of risk behaviour ( $p<.001$ ). Older adolescents reported more delinquent behaviour ( $p<.01$ ). Adolescents with lower academic success reported higher risk of family surroundings ( $p<.01$ ), higher parental approval of adolescent risk behaviour ( $p<.01$ ), and more delinquent behaviour ( $p<.001$ ), and antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $p<.05$ ). Adolescents from incomplete families received higher scores in risk of family surroundings ( $p<.001$ ), family violence ( $p<.001$ ) and parental approval of their risk behaviour ( $p<.001$ ). Adolescents from incomplete families reported more delinquent behaviour ( $p<.001$ ) and antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $p<.001$ ). Adolescent antisocial behaviour and criminal acts correlated negatively with parent involvement in adolescent life ( $p<.001$ ), closeness with parents ( $p<.001$ ), and quality of communication and parental support ( $p<.01$ ).

### **I. Introduction**

Adolescent antisocial behaviour is a well examined interdisciplinary problem. The adolescent's family life quality is often considered as the most important factor in the onset and prevention of antisocial behaviour [1-3]. Parenting as a risk factor in problem behaviour includes two dimensions, harsh treatment (including hostility, criticality and rejection) and lack of clear discipline or supervision [3, 4]. Studies have found a wide range of family factors predicting adolescent antisocial behaviour, such as inadequate parental supervision [1,2,5], lack of closeness and acceptance in parent-adolescent relationship [1], as well as parental involvement in criminal activity [2].

### **II. Theoretical background**

Different theories explained adolescent antisocial behaviours and the role of family life quality in its aetiology. Hirschi developed *control theory*, which emphasized the idea of social bonding with focus on circumstances and restraints that prevent delinquency [6]. Precisely, absence of close relationships with conventional others lead to weak or broken bonds to society and societal values, which allowed engaging in delinquency. On the contrary, *social learning theory* suggested that family members directly influence adolescent antisocial behaviours [3]. Social behaviour formed through direct conditioning and imitation of modelled behaviour [7]. *Social development theory* emphasized biological, psychological, and social factors at different levels and in different social structures, within the individual and in the family, school, peer group, and community, that contribute to antisocial behaviour [8]. It also incorporated protective factors that mediate effects of exposure to different risk factors [9]. While the *control theory* emphasized bonding to antisocial others in aetiology of antisocial behaviour, *social development theory* emphasised antisocial values and behaviours held

by *significant others* [9]. Previous studies emphasized negative quality of the parent-adolescent relationship, characterized by conflicts and a lack of closeness and acceptance, as risk factors for involvement in antisocial behaviour [1,5,10]. For example, a study found that disrupted family processes, which include a lack of parental support and discipline, are related to adolescent internalizing and externalizing behaviour [10]. A study on British males established important family interaction factors as predictors for delinquent and antisocial behaviour, among which were inconsistent or abusive parenting practice, parental rejection and poor supervision, low involvement in child's life, divorce and parental conflict [11]. Aside from family interactions, the role of sociodemographic traits in the development of antisocial behaviour was examined. While some studies emphasised low family income, lower socio-economic status and large family size as risk factors in childhood for later involvement in antisocial behaviour [11], other failed in relating socio-economic status to adolescent antisocial behaviour [1].

### **III. Method**

**III.1. The aim** of the research was to examine the role of family life quality as risk and protective factor in the aetiology of adolescent antisocial behaviour.

**III.2. The objective** of this research was to examine the role of family relationship quality, parent-adolescent closeness and family sociodemographic traits as risk or protective factors, and to establish possible correlations with adolescent risk behaviour.

**III.3. The research problem** was to describe the relations between sociodemographic traits, structural features and the quality of family relations, parental actions and attitudes with adolescent's antisocial behaviours. Moreover, the research problem was to identify the most important risk and protective factors in the aetiology of adolescent antisocial behaviours.

### **III.4. Hypotheses**

**H1** There is a significant difference in the likelihood of antisocial behaviour with respect to the socio-demographic traits.

**H2** There is a significant difference in the likelihood of antisocial behaviour with respect to family life quality.

**H3** Significant correlation between family life quality and antisocial behaviour is expected.

### **III.5. Participants**

The research was conducted in Croatia during 2015 with 1300 adolescent participants aged 15-16 (N=799, 60%) and 17-18 (N=496, 40%).

### **III.6. Instrument**

A multidimensional nine-part questionnaire was implemented. The first part consisted of questions concerning sociodemographic traits. The second part consisted of questions concerning family life quality and parental behaviour and attitudes (closeness with parents ( $\alpha=.99$ ), quality of communication and parental support ( $\alpha=.91$ ), parent involvement in adolescent life ( $\alpha=.98$ ), family violence ( $\alpha=.95$ ) and parental approval of adolescent risk behaviour ( $\alpha=.96$ ) and risk of family surroundings ( $\alpha=.74$ )). The third part consisted of questions concerning adolescent risk behaviour (antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $\alpha=.99$ ), delinquent behaviour ( $\alpha=.99$ )).

### III.7. Procedure

The research was conducted during spring of 2015 with high school students from Croatia. A paper survey was implemented during regular school activities. Written consent from the participants and their parents was obtained prior to the research. The students filled the questionnaires in the presence of the researcher who helped them clarify certain questions and checked if they fully completed the survey.

### IV. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents results of t-test for independent samples on gender differences.

*Table 1* T-test for independent samples on gender differences

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	t
Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	F	678	10,30	4,64	<b>-3,81***</b>
	M	619	11,35	5,19	
Parent involvement in adolescent life	F	678	37,54	5,44	<b>4,99***</b>
	M	619	35,89	6,47	
Family violence	F	678	10,59	4,44	1,47
	M	619	10,23	4,60	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behaviour	F	678	8,41	3,23	<b>-4,15***</b>
	M	619	9,24	3,96	
Closeness with parents	F	678	27,60	5,27	<b>3,59***</b>
	M	619	26,48	6,00	
Quality of communication and parental support	F	678	49,09	8,77	<b>3,57***</b>
	M	619	47,26	9,69	
Delinquent behaviour	F	678	9,85	4,48	<b>-6,22***</b>
	M	619	11,56	5,37	
Risk of family surroundings	F	678	10,65	4,19	,63
	M	619	10,51	3,87	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$

The t-test for gender showed significant differences, with boys reporting higher delinquent behaviour ( $t = -6,22$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M = 11,56$ ), antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $t = -3,81$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M = 11,35$ ) and parental approval of their risk behaviour ( $t = -4,15$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M = 9,24$ ). These findings are in line with previous studies that found boys significantly more engaged in antisocial behaviour [12, 13]. Our results showed girls reporting significantly higher quality of communication and parental support ( $t = 3,57$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M = 49,09$ ), more parental involvement in their life ( $t = 4,99$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M = 37,54$ ) and more closeness with parents ( $t = 3,59$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M = 27,60$ ). No significant gender differences were established in the reported risk of family surroundings and family violence.

*Table 2* T-test for independent samples on age differences

Variable	AGE	N	M	SD	t
Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	Younger	801	10,62	4,52	1,66
	Older	496	11,09	5,55	
Parent involvement in adolescent life	Younger	801	36,90	5,76	1,15
	Older	496	36,51	6,37	
Family violence	Younger	801	10,41	4,23	,14
	Older	496	10,44	4,96	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behavior	Younger	801	8,60	3,18	<b>2,60**</b>
	Older	496	9,14	4,22	
Closeness with parents	Younger	801	27,17	5,38	,85
	Older	496	26,89	6,08	
Quality of communication and parental support	Younger	801	48,24	8,94	,15

	Older	496	48,17	9,76	
Delinquent behaviour	Younger	801	10,33	4,69	<b>3,05**</b>
	Older	496	11,20	5,40	
Risk of family surroundings	Younger	801	10,48	3,91	1,13
	Older	496	10,74	4,24	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$

The t-test on age differences showed significant differences between participants in delinquent behaviour ( $t=3,05$ ,  $p < ,01$ ), with older adolescents receiving higher scores than younger adolescents ( $M=11,20$ ). This is consistent with findings from previous research [14]. Furthermore, age differences were established between participants in parental approval of antisocial behaviour ( $t=2,60$ ,  $p < ,01$ ), with older adolescents reporting higher approval ( $M=9,14$ ).

**Table 3** T-test for independent samples on academic achievement

Variable	Acad. achiev.	N	M	SD	t
Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	Lower	402	11,30	5,54	<b>2,45*</b>
	Higher	895	10,58	4,63	
Parent involvement in adolescent life	Lower	402	35,95	6,68	<b>3,25**</b>
	Higher	895	37,11	5,64	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behavior	Lower	402	9,22	4,27	<b>2,78**</b>
	Higher	895	8,62	3,27	
Quality of communication and parental support	Lower	402	47,45	9,93	<b>2,01*</b>
	Higher	895	48,56	8,92	
Delinquent behaviour	Lower	402	11,69	5,66	<b>5,02***</b>
	Higher	895	10,20	4,59	
Risk of family surroundings	Lower	402	11,05	4,44	<b>2,87**</b>
	Higher	895	10,37	3,83	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$  ; *only significant results shown*

The t-test on academic achievement showed significant differences in all examined variables, with exception to family violence and closeness with parents. Adolescents with lower academic achievement receive higher scores on risk of family surroundings ( $t=2,87$ ,  $p < ,01$ ,  $M=11,05$ ) and parental approval of adolescents risk behaviour ( $t=2,78$ ,  $p < ,01$ ,  $M=9,22$ ), more frequently engage in delinquent behaviour ( $t=5,02$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=11,69$ ) and in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $t=2,45$ ,  $p < ,05$ ,  $M=11,30$ ). These findings are in line with previous studies [15]. On the contrary, adolescents with higher academic achievement report higher satisfaction with quality of communication and parental support ( $t=2,01$ ,  $p < ,05$ ,  $M=48,56$ ) and perceive greater parent involvement in their lives ( $t=3,25$ ,  $p < ,01$ ,  $M=37,11$ ).

**Table 4** T-test for independent samples on family structure

Variable	Family structure	N	M	SD	t
Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	Complete	1134	10,45	4,07	<b>6,85***</b>
	Incomplete	163	13,24	8,54	
Parent involvement in adolescent life	Complete	1134	36,98	5,68	<b>3,63***</b>
	Incomplete	163	35,16	7,72	
Family violence	Complete	1134	10,22	4,00	<b>4,20***</b>
	Incomplete	163	11,80	7,01	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behaviour	Complete	1134	8,56	3,11	<b>6,60***</b>
	Incomplete	163	10,53	5,79	
Closeness with parents	Complete	1134	27,30	5,48	<b>3,97***</b>
	Incomplete	163	25,43	6,59	
Delinquent behaviour	Complete	1134	10,38	4,54	<b>5,57***</b>
	Incomplete	163	12,68	7,11	

Risk of family surroundings	Complete	1134	10,21	3,26	<b>8,89***</b>
	Incomplete	163	13,14	6,97	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$ ; ; *only significant results shown*

The t-test on family structure showed significant differences in all examined variables, with exception to the quality of communication and parental support. Adolescents from incomplete families received higher scores in risk of family surroundings ( $t=8,89$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=13,14$ ), family violence ( $t=4,20$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M= 11,80$ ) and parental approval of their risk behaviour ( $t=6,66$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=10,53$ ). Furthermore, adolescents from incomplete families are more engaged in delinquent behaviour ( $t=5,57$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=12,68$ ) and in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $t=6,85$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=13,24$ ), similarly to research findings from Moffitt et al. (2001), who found that children who grew up in single parent families tended to become delinquent and antisocial. Finally, family structure showed adolescents from complete families receiving higher scores in closeness with parents ( $t=3,97$ ,  $p < ,001$ ) and parent involvement in their lives ( $t=3,63$ ,  $p < ,001$ ).

**Table 5** T-test for independent samples on relationship type

Variable	Relation type	N	M	SD	t
Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	Marriage	1140	10,47	4,08	<b>6,64***</b>
	Non-marriage	157	13,22	8,61	
Parent involvement in adolescent life	Marriage	1140	36,95	5,73	<b>3,18**</b>
	Non-marriage	157	35,32	7,59	
Family violence	Marriage	1140	10,26	4,14	<b>3,57***</b>
	Non-marriage	157	11,62	6,56	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behaviour	Marriage	1140	8,58	3,13	<b>6,19***</b>
	Non-marriage	157	10,46	5,83	
Closeness with parents	Marriage	1140	27,29	5,49	<b>3,94***</b>
	Non-marriage	157	25,41	6,52	
Quality of communication and parental support	Marriage	1140	48,35	9,03	1,46
	Non-marriage	157	47,19	10,76	
Delinquent behaviour	Marriage	1140	10,38	4,56	<b>5,58***</b>
	Non-marriage	157	12,73	7,09	
Risk of family surroundings	Marriage	1140	10,22	3,27	<b>8,85***</b>
	Non-marriage	157	13,18	7,04	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$ ; ; *only significant results shown*

The t-test on relationship type showed significant differences in all examined variables, with exception to quality of communication and parental support. Adolescents who live in families with married parents perceive their parents as more involved in their life ( $t=3,18$ ,  $p < ,01$ ,  $M=36,95$ ) and perceive more closeness in their relationship with parents ( $t=3,94$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=27,29$ ). On the contrary, adolescents with non-married parents receive higher scores in family violence ( $t=3,57$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=11,62$ ), parental approval of risk behaviour ( $t=6,19$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=10,46$ ) and risk of family surroundings ( $t=8,85$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=13,18$ ). Moreover, adolescents with non-married parents more often engage in delinquent behaviour ( $t=5,58$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=12,73$ ) and in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $t=6,64$ ,  $p < ,001$ ,  $M=13,22$ ). Previous studies also emphasize the link between marital discord and divorce with the development of delinquent behaviour, based on the assumption that its impact is mediated through family management practices [3].

**Table 6** T-test for independent samples on father's education level

Variable	Father educ.	N	M	SD	t
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Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	Lower	1040	10,41	3,91	<b>3,20**</b>
	Higher	219	11,43	5,71	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behavior	Lower	1040	8,61	3,23	<b>2,20*</b>
	Higher	219	9,16	3,83	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$  ; *only significant results shown*

The father's educational level was significant only in the parental approval of adolescent risk behaviour ( $t=2,20$ ,  $p < ,05$ ), and in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $t=3,20$ ,  $p < ,01$ ), with adolescents whose fathers had lower educational level reporting higher approval of their risk behaviour ( $M=9,16$ ) and more involvement in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $M=11,43$ ).

**Table 7** T-test for independent samples on mother's education level

Variable	Mother educ.	N	M	SD	t
Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	Lower	1048	10,49	4,15	<b>-2,92**</b>
	Higher	224	11,48	6,10	
Risk of family surroundings	Lower	1048	10,36	3,57	<b>-3,02**</b>
	Higher	224	11,22	4,96	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$  ; *only significant results shown*

The mother's educational level was significant only in the risk of family surroundings ( $t=-3,02$ ,  $p < ,01$ ) and in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $t=-2,92$ ,  $p < ,01$ ), with adolescents whose mothers had higher educational level reporting higher risk of their family surroundings ( $M=11,22$ ) and more involvement in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $M=11,48$ ).

**Table 8** ANOVA of family economic well-being

Variable	Family standard	N	M	SD	F
Parent involvement in adolescent life	Low (*<3)	184	35,57	6,80	
	Average	793	36,68	5,73	<b>6,75**</b>
	High*	320	37,58	6,05	
Family violence	Low (*<2,3)	184	11,86	5,49	
	Average*	793	10,26	4,16	<b>11,64***</b>
	High*	320	9,98	4,59	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behavior	Low	184	9,09	3,72	
	Average	793	8,59	3,19	<b>3,39*</b>
	High	320	9,15	4,43	
Closeness with parents	Low(*<2,3)	184	25,88	5,89	
	Average*	793	27,15	5,50	<b>5,26**</b>
	High*	320	27,53	5,82	
Quality of communication and parental support	Low(*<3)	184	46,77	9,84	
	Average	793	48,15	9,07	<b>4,09*</b>
	High*	320	49,20	9,29	
Risk of family surroundings	Low(*<2,3)	184	11,89	5,40	
	Average*	793	10,26	3,37	<b>12,45***</b>
	High*	320	10,61	4,46	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$  (\*< sig. between groups 1,2,3) ; *only significant results shown*

A one-way ANOVA was implemented in the analysis of the importance of family economic well-being. Significant differences were established in all examined variables, with exception to delinquent behaviour ( $F(2,1294)=1,78$ ,  $p=,17$ ) and in antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $F(2,1294)=2,77$   $p=,06$ ). These findings are in line with

previous research [1], which did not relate family economic well-being to adolescent antisocial behaviour.

**Table 9** ANOVA of father's work status

Variable	Work status (F)	N	M	SD	F
Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts	Employed (*<3)	908	10,51	4,04	
	Unempl/retired(*<3)	242	10,7	4,76	<b>12,92***</b>
	Other*	147	12,72	8,56	
Family violence	Employed(*<3)	908	10,12	4,01	
	Unemployed/retired	242	10,90	5,08	<b>7,39**</b>
	Other*	147	11,46	6,05	
Parental approval of adolescent risk behavior	Employed (*<3)	908	8,64	3,26	
	Unemployed/retired	242	8,84	3,93	<b>5,97**</b>
	Other*	147	9,74	4,84	
Delinquent behaviour	Employed (*<3)	908	10,44	4,56	
	Unempld/retird(*<3)	242	10,61	4,96	<b>6,83**</b>
	Other*	147	12,08	6,98	
Risk of family surroundings	Employed (*<3)	908	10,19	3,32	
	Unempld/retird(*<3)	242	10,88	4,14	<b>20,99***</b>
	Other*	147	12,44	6,54	

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$  (\*< sig. between groups 1,2,3) ; *only significant results shown*

The father's work status was significant for delinquent behaviour ( $F(2,1294)=6,83$ ,  $p=,001$ ) and antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $F(2,1294)=12,92$ ,  $p=,000$ ). Adolescents whose fathers have alternative work status, neither employed nor unemployed, are more involved in delinquent ( $M=12,08$ ) and antisocial behaviour and criminal acts ( $M=12,72$ ). The mother's work status was not significant.

**Table 10** Correlation analysis

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>1</b>	<i>R</i>	-	,465***	<b>,758***</b>	,551***	-,309***	<b>,622***</b>	-,226***	-,247***
<b>2</b>	<i>R</i>	,465***	-	,375***	,433***	-,297***	,557***	-,328***	-,394***
<b>3</b>	<i>R</i>	<b>,758***</b>	,375***	-	,496***	-,319***	,510***	-,240***	-,245***
<b>4</b>	<i>R</i>	,551***	,433***	,496***	-	-,263***	,428***	-,216***	-,199***
<b>5</b>	<i>R</i>	-,309***	-,297***	-,319***	-,263***	-	-,290***	<b>,706***</b>	<b>,744***</b>
<b>6</b>	<i>R</i>	<b>,622***</b>	,557***	,510***	,428***	-,290***	-	-,189***	-,206***
<b>7</b>	<i>R</i>	-,226***	-,328***	-,240***	-,216***	<b>,706***</b>	-,189***	-	<b>,796***</b>
<b>8</b>	<i>R</i>	-,247**	-,394***	-,245***	-,199***	<b>,744***</b>	-,206***	<b>,796***</b>	-

Note:  $p < ,05^*$ ;  $p < ,01^{**}$ ;  $p < ,001^{***}$

Correlation matrix legend: *Antisocial behaviour and criminal acts (1), Family violence (2), Delinquent behaviour (3), Risk of family surroundings (4), Parent involvement in adolescent life (5), Parental approval of adolescent risk behavior (6), Closeness with parents (7), Quality of communication and parental support (8).*

The correlation matrix showed significant relations between adolescent delinquent and antisocial behaviour and variables concerning family life quality. The role of positive family life quality is emphasized, since adolescent antisocial behaviour and criminal acts correlates negatively with parent involvement in adolescent life ( $r=-,309$ ,  $p<,001$ ), closeness with parents ( $r=-,226$ ,  $p<,001$ ), and quality of communication and parental support ( $r=-,247$ ,  $p<,01$ ). Furthermore, adolescent antisocial behaviour and criminal acts correlated positively with family violence ( $r=,465$ ,  $p<,001$ ), risk of family surroundings ( $r=,551$ ,  $p<,001$ ) and parental approval of adolescent risk behaviour ( $r=,622$ ,  $p<,001$ ). Similarly, the correlation of delinquent behaviour and family life quality follows the same pattern. These finding are consistent with previous studies [1, 13]. For example,

Moffitt et al. [13] found that a negative relationship with parents in adolescence was associated with antisocial behaviour among adolescents for both genders.

## V. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine the role of family life quality as risk and protective factor in the aetiology of adolescent's antisocial behaviour. The results showed significant differences in the prevalence of antisocial behaviour with respect to most of the examined socio-demographic traits. Older adolescent boys with lower academic achievement from incomplete families, with higher educated unmarried parents and unemployed fathers were at increased risk of developing antisocial behaviour. Furthermore, there were significant differences in antisocial behaviour with respect to family life quality. Adolescents who experienced family violence and lived in more risky family surroundings, with higher parental approval of their risk behaviour engaged in more risk behaviour. On the contrary, adolescents with more everyday parent involvement, who felt close to their parents and had quality communication, were less engaged in antisocial behaviour. These findings indicate the importance of including family factors in the development of prevention programs for delinquent and antisocial adolescent behaviour.

## V. Literature

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