

Communication, Conflict Resolution Skills, And Stress As Correlates Of Marital Health Among Couples In A Selected Pentecostal Church In Ogun State, Nigeria



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Abstract

Introduction: Happier marriages are associated with improved mental and physical well-being. Therefore, this study investigated communication, conflict resolution skills, and perceived stress as correlates of marital health among the married couples in a selected Pentecostal Church in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Methods: The study adopted a survey design and used a multi-stage sampling technique to select the three hundred and ninety (390) participants for this study. Four validated questionnaires were used for data collection. Four research questions were formulated, tested, and analysed using descriptive analysis as well as PPMC at 0.05 level of significance.

Results: The results of this study revealed that married couples were highly satisfied (mean = 48.726, SD = 8.603), adjusted (mean = 47.459, SD = 5.317) and have high quality marriage (mean = 41.126, SD = 9.594). Additionally, communication patterns (Mean = 4.12, 82.4%), conflict resolution skills (Mean = 3.81, 76.2%) were found to be high while marital stress (mean = 2.68, 53.2%) on the average. It was equally revealed that marital health was found to be related with the spouse's communication patterns ($r = 902$, Mean = 41.164, Std. Dev. = 7.626, $p = .000$), conflict resolution ($r = 489$, Mean = 38.146, Std. Dev. = 5.716, $p = .000$), perceived stress ($r = -.615$, Mean = 21.441, Std. Dev. = 4.229, $p = .000$).

Conclusion: Sequel to the findings of this study, it is concluded that communication, conflict resolution skills, and perceived stress are good correlates of marital health, while most couples in the study area reported high levels of marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and marital quality. It was recommended that couples should be encouraged to engage in programs and workshops that promote effective communication and conflict resolution skills to enhance marital health.

Key words: Communication, conflict resolution skills, couples, marital adjustment, marital quality, marital satisfaction, Stress

Introduction

Marriage has long been regarded as a foundational institution for organizing relationships and facilitating reproduction across the globe.¹ While many couples view marriage as a significant commitment to their romantic relationship, others may find marriage less relevant or unnecessary. In modern societies, alternative relationship arrangements have emerged alongside traditional marriage. These alternatives include cohabitating heterosexual relationships, same-sex relationships, same-sex marriages, and polyamory.² However, the choice of each type is often influenced by various factors, including personal orientations toward marriage.

Building upon Lacks' study³, the concept of marital health has been extensively explored in academic

literature, encompassing various dimensions that contribute to the overall well-being of a marital relationship. Marital health is broadly defined as the quality of the relationship between committed partners, including subjective evaluations and observable behaviors within the marriage. Cummings and Papp⁴ describe it as a global assessment of marriage, encompassing both positive and negative interactions. According to Lacks³, it includes key components such as marital satisfaction, marital adjustment and quality. These elements are interrelated and collectively influence the well-being of both partners.

Marital satisfaction represents a spouse's overall personal evaluation of their marriage and is often used interchangeably with terms such as marital well-being, marital adjustment, marital happiness,

and marital quality.^{5,6} According to Idemudia and Ndlovu⁷, it is defined as “the degree to which an individual’s needs, expectations, and desires are being satisfied in their marriage—a subjective condition that can only be described by the individual spouse” (pg. 5487). Based on fulfillment of personal needs, expectations, and desires, Xie et al.⁸ defined marital satisfaction as an individual’s subjective evaluation of their marriage. This subjectivity makes it a multifaceted and dynamic construct, influenced by personal values, relationship expectations, and situational contexts that vary widely between individuals.⁹ This highlights the difficulty in pinpointing a definitive structure for understanding satisfaction, as diverse factors contribute to how individuals perceive their marriage’s quality and success. According to Ayodele and Ogunsanwo,¹⁰ marital satisfaction is a mental state shaped by perceived benefits and costs within the marriage. This implies that marital satisfaction is maximized when the rewards for both partners outweigh the costs, making the relationship more appealing than alternatives.

Marital adjustment refers to the process by which a married couple adapts to the various aspects of their relationship and their roles as husband and wife. Marital adjustment is distinct from marital satisfaction, even though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Marital satisfaction focuses solely on how satisfied each partner is within the relationship, while marital adjustment encompasses a broader range of components, including satisfaction, that are used to predict marital success.¹¹ For instance, well-adjusted couples are not only satisfied but also exhibit behaviors that indicate they can navigate challenges effectively and maintain a balanced relationship.

Marital quality is another crucial aspect of a relationship, as it directly influences individuals’ well-being and overall life satisfaction.¹² However, marital quality is not a one-dimensional concept. It varies among couples and evolves over time. Researchers have approached marital quality from different perspectives, with some viewing it as an independent assessment of the relationship, while others see it as a characteristic that describes the relationship itself. It should be noted that marital health is a critical aspect of human relationships that influences the overall well-being of individuals, families, and society. However, in recent years, there have been noticeable challenges affecting marital health among couples. Issues such as poor communication, lack of emotional support, and unmet expectations have surfaced, causing significant strain on marital relationships. These challenges, if left unaddressed, could lead to more profound consequences for individuals, their families, and the broader community. The problem

is rooted in the fact that marital status, often seen as a stabilizing factor, can become a source of discord when couples struggle to maintain healthy relationships. For example, when partners fail to communicate effectively or adapt to each other’s needs, the result is often dissatisfaction, resentment, and conflict. These problems are exacerbated by societal pressures, financial challenges, and limited access to counseling or support systems, especially within the church environment.

The consequences of poor marital health are already evident. Strained marriages often lead to emotional and psychological distress, such as depression and anxiety, for both partners. Additionally, these issues can spill over into the family unit, affecting children who may experience instability and insecurity. Beyond the home, fractured marriages can disrupt the social fabric of the church community, leading to reduced cohesion and support among members. If these problems persist without intervention, the long-term consequences could be severe. Rising rates of separation or divorce within the church community could result in broken families, negatively impacting the spiritual and emotional growth of individuals. Moreover, unresolved marital issues may hinder the couples’ ability to contribute positively to their environment, leading to a cycle of dissatisfaction and disengagement.

Marital health is a vital component of individual well-being and societal stability as strong and fulfilling marriages contribute to emotional and psychological health, reduce social burdens, and foster positive outcomes for children.¹³ Given the central role of marriage in socialization and community cohesion, understanding the factors that influence marital health is essential, particularly in culturally and religiously driven societies like Nigeria. Therefore, this study assessed communication, conflict resolution skills, and perceived stress as correlates of marital health among the married couples in a selected Pentecostal Church in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of marital health (satisfaction, adjustment, and quality) among married couples in a selected Pentecostal Church in Ogun State?
2. What is the level of communication among married couples in church?
3. To what extent does married couples utilized conflict resolution skills in their relationship?
4. What is the level of stress among couples in the church?
5. What is the relationship between communication, conflict resolution skills, perceived stress and marital health among the married couples in the Church?

Methods

Research Design: The study adopted a quantitative design using a descriptive cross-sectional approach. The cross sectional was chosen because it cut across many married couples, thereby including wide range of couples and gathered data at a single point in time providing a comprehensive understanding of the current experiences, challenges, and the perspectives of married couples in the selected Pentecostal church in Ogun State.

Population: The target population for this study was married couples who are members of Living Faith Church, Ogun Province. This included those who met specific inclusion criteria. To ensure inclusivity, the study sampled participants from various branches of the church within Ogun State. Living Faith Church has four branches in each local government area, and with Ogun State comprising 20 local government areas, there are approximately 80 branches of Living Faith Church across the state. This broad distribution allowed for a diverse and representative sample of married couples from different socio-demographic backgrounds within the church.

Sample: This study employed the Kish Leslie's formula to arrive at 422 sample for the study. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the 422 married persons. Ogun State was divided into three Senatorial districts as Ogun East, West, and Central. A random sampling technique was conducted to select two (2) local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts. The decision to select two local government areas from each senatorial district was made to ensure balanced geographical representation across Ogun State. A total of twelve (12) Living Faith Churches were selected across the six local government areas. To determine the number of participants to recruit from each church, a proportional sampling method was employed based on the seating capacities of the selected churches.

Instrumentation: The following instruments were used:

Communication was assessed using the Managing Affect and Differences Scale (MADS) developed by Abreu-Afonso and Leal¹⁴. This self-report instrument consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Conflict Resolution Skill was measured using the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II)¹⁵. The CRSI assesses individuals' approaches to managing conflict within their relationships, including styles such as compromising,

collaborating, avoiding, accommodating, and competing. Respondents will rate how often they use each of these strategies in their marital relationship on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" to "always."

Stress was measured using standardized self-report scales that assess perceived stress levels. One widely used tool is the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen et al.¹⁶ The PSS measures the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful, focusing on feelings of unpredictability, uncontrollability, and overload using 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = Never to 4 = Very Often.

Marital Health was assessed through a 35-item scale assessing an individual's perceptions of their relationship with their partner. Marital satisfaction, marital adjustment and marital quality was measured using items adapted from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier¹⁷). The scale covers four key areas: dyadic consensus (marital adjustment), dyadic satisfaction (relationship satisfaction), dyadic affectional expression. Marital quality, on the other hand was assessed using a multidimensional self-report scale developed by Anisha Shah¹⁸. This scale measures marital quality base the evaluation on both positive and negative aspects of the relationship, including relationship satisfaction, stability, trust, intimacy, and effective communication.

Method of Data Collection: The researchers worked closely with church leaders and marriage counselors to coordinate the distribution process, ensuring that participants clearly understand the purpose of the study and how to complete the questionnaire accurately. The questionnaires was administered during church gatherings, such as marriage enrichment programs, couples' fellowships, and other relevant church meetings, to maximize participation. The researchers, along with designated church officials were present during these sessions to provide any necessary clarifications and address participants' questions. The distribution and collection of the questionnaires spanned for a period of two weeks to ensure a high response rate. Each completed questionnaire was securely collected, assigned an identification number for tracking purposes, and prepared for data analysis.

Data Analysis: The data collected for this study was processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26. Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significant level using regression analysis.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n=390)	Percentage
Age (as at last birthday)	Less than 20 years	52	13.3%
	21-30years	26	6.7%
	31-40 years	207	53.1%
	41-50 years	73	18.7%
	51- 60 years	25	6.4%
	61years - above	7	1.8%
Gender	Male	135	45.0%
	Female	165	55.0%
Ethnicity	Yoruba	150	50.0%
	Igbo	13	4.3%
	Others	137	45.7%
Level of Education	Tertiary education	167	55.7%
	Postgraduate education	133	44.3%
Social class	Middle	354	90.8%
	High	36	9.2%
Occupation	Teacher/Lecturer	66	22.0%
	Self-employed	75	25%
	Others	159	53.0%
Monthly income	#50,000-100,000	86	28.7%
	#100,000-200,000	62	20.7%
	>#200,000	152	50.7%
Number of children	No children	21	7.0%
	≤3 children	219	73.0%
	>3 children	60	20.0%
Duration of Marriage	≤10 years	142	47.3%
	> 10 years	158	52.7%

Table 1 indicates that majority of respondents (204, 68.0%) are between 31-40 years, while only 7 (2.3%) are above 60 years. More than half (165, 55.0%) of the respondents are females. Ethnically, 150 (50.0%) are Yoruba, while 137 (45.7%) belong to other ethnic groups. Regarding education, 167 (55.7%) have tertiary education, while 133 (44.3%) hold postgraduate degrees. Most respondents (271, 90.3%) belong to the middle social class, with only 29 (9.7%) in the high social class. In terms of occupation, the largest proportion (75, 25.0%) are

self-employed, followed by teachers/lecturers (66, 22.0%), while only 8 (2.7%) work as cardiac physiologists or customer support staff. Regarding income, 152 (50.7%) earn above ₦200,000 monthly, while 86 (28.7%) earn between ₦50,000-100,000. Most respondents (219, 73.0%) have three or fewer children, and only 21 (7.0%) have no children. In terms of marriage duration, 142 (47.3%) have been married for 10 years or less, while only 7 (2.3%) have been married for over 30 years.

Table 2: Descriptive data showing the level of marital health (satisfaction, adjustment, and quality) among married couples

Marital Health Component			Freq.	%	Mean	Std Dev
Marital satisfaction	High	(41-60)	342	87.7	48.726 (81.2%)	8.603
	Moderate	(21-40)	48	12.3		
	Low	(1-20)	-	-		
Total			390	100.0		
Marital adjustment	High	(41-60)	315	80.8	46.459 (77.4%)	5.317
	Moderate	(21-40)	75	19.2		
	Low	(1-20)	-	-		
Total			390	100.0		
Marital quality	High	(35-50)	328	84.1	41.126 (82.3%)	9.594
	Moderate	(18-34)	40	10.3		
	Low	(1-17)	22	5.6		
Total			390	100.0		

The marital health among married couples in the study area was assessed on three (3) dimensions. These are marital satisfaction, marital adjustment and marital quality. These dimensions were categorized as high, moderate/average and low. The results of this study revealed that married couples were highly satisfied (mean = 48.726, SD =

8.603) and adjusted (mean = 47.459, SD = 5.317) in their marriage. Additionally, they have high quality marriage (mean = 41.126, SD = 9.594). It could then be deduced generally that the level of marital health among married couples in the study area is good, encouraging and satisfactory.

Table 3: Level of Communication of respondents

	Communication	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	My spouse and I openly discuss our feelings.	10 (2.6)	40 (10.3)	19 (4.9)	142 (36.4)	179 (45.9)	4.13	1.07
2	We effectively listen to each other during conversations.	-	9 (2.3)	17 (4.4)	139 (35.6)	225 (57.7)	4.49	0.69
3	I feel comfortable expressing my concerns to my spouse.	18 (4.6)	30 (7.7)	-	183 (46.9)	159 (40.8)	4.12	1.06
4	We avoid misunderstandings through clear communication.	9 (2.3)	30 (7.7)	-	158 (40.5)	193 (49.5)	4.27	0.97
5	My spouse acknowledges my opinions even when we disagree.	7 (1.8)	47 (12.1)	17 (4.4)	229 (58.7)	90 (23.1)	3.89	0.95
6	We discuss sensitive topics without tension.	9 (2.3)	85 (21.8)	13 (3.3)	125 (32.1)	158 (40.5)	3.87	1.23
7	We address problems directly and constructively.	9 (2.3)	16 (4.1)	7 (1.8)	246 (63.1)	112 (28.7)	4.12	0.82
8	I feel heard and understood by my spouse.	9 (2.3)	16 (4.1)	12 (3.1)	215 (55.1)	138 (35.4)	4.17	0.85
9	We frequently check in with each other about our feelings.	9 (2.3)	38 (9.7)	59 (15.1)	160 (41.0)	124 (31.8)	3.90	1.03
10	My spouse and I use positive language during discussions.	9 (2.3)	-	25 (6.4)	222 (56.9)	134 (34.4)	4.21	0.76
Weighted Mean Score = 4.12 (82.4%)								

The findings in Table 3 showed that the communication patterns among married couples in the study area has a grand mean score of 4.12 (82.4%) and it is highly prominent on the scale of 5. For instance, majority of the respondents in this study demonstrated good and high level of open discussion of feelings (4.13), effective listening skills (4.49), comfortable expression (4.12), clear

communication (4.27), and respects for others opinions (3.89). Additionally, the spouses in the study area discussed sensitive topics without tension (3.87), addressed problems directly and constructively (4.12), felt heard and understood by their spouses (4.17), frequently checked in with each other about their feelings (3.90), and used positive language during discussions (4.21).

Table 4: Respondents' responses on conflict resolution

		N	R	S	O	A	Mean	SD
1	I try to find a middle ground to resolve conflicts.	30 (7.7)	33 (8.5)	63 (16.2)	141(36.2)	123(31.5)	3.75	1.20
2	I collaborate with my spouse to find solutions.	-	9 (2.3)	52 (13.1)	121(31.0)	209(53.6)	4.36	0.79
3	I avoid confrontations to maintain peace.	33 (8.5)	29 (7.4)	99(25.4)	81 (20.8)	148(37.9)	3.72	1.27
4	I accommodate my spouse's needs during disagreements.	18(4.6)	24(6.2)	43 (11.0)	128(32.8)	177(45.4)	4.08	1.11
5	I stand firm on my viewpoint during conflicts.	14(3.6)	70(17.9)	174(44.6)	69 (17.7)	63 (16.2)	3.25	1.04
6	I seek compromise to resolve differences.	8(2.1)	61 (15.6)	155(39.7)	133(34.1)	33(8.5)	3.31	0.91
7	I express my feelings honestly during conflicts.	-	16 (4.1)	38 (9.7)	120(30.8)	216(55.4)	4.37	0.82
8	I try to understand my spouse's perspective during arguments.	-	16 (4.1)	73(18.7)	108(27.7)	193(49.5)	4.23	0.89
9	I stay calm and composed during disagreements.	-	31 (7.9)	118(30.3)	139(35.6)	102(26.2)	3.80	0.92
10	I suggest taking breaks during heated arguments to cool down.	52 (13.3)	43(11.0)	76(19.5)	187(47.9)	32 (8.2)	3.27	1.18
Weighted Mean Score = 3.81 (76.2%)								

Table 4 reveals the conflict resolution skills among married couples in the study area. On a scale of 5, the respondents has a mean score of 3.81 (76.2%), which means that majority of the respondents in this study has good or high level of conflict management abilities. For instance, it was revealed that majority of the respondents has a good abilities in finding a middle ground to resolve conflicts (3.75), collaborates with their spouses to find solutions to issues (4.36), avoided confrontations to

maintain peace (3.72), accommodated spouse's needs during disagreements (4.08), stand firm on their viewpoint during conflicts (3.25), sought compromise to resolve differences (3.31), expressed their feelings honestly during conflicts (4.37), understand my spouse's perspective during arguments (4.23), stayed calm and composed during disagreements (3.80), and took breaks during heated arguments to cool down (3.71).

Table 5: Respondents' responses on perceived stress

	Stress	N	AN	S	O	VO	Mean	SD
1	I feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities in my marriage.	53 (13.6)	22 (5.6)	208 (53.3)	54 (13.8)	53 (13.6)	3.08	1.13
2	I find it difficult to control the important things in my relationship.	99 (25.4)	149 (38.2)	102 (26.2)	24 (6.2)	16 (4.1)	2.25	1.03
3	I feel nervous or stressed about marital issues.	138 (35.4)	95 (24.4)	90 (23.1)	37 (9.5)	30 (7.7)	2.30	1.25
4	I feel confident in my ability to handle personal problems within my marriage.	-	-	57 (14.6)	184 (47.2)	149 (38.2)	4.24	0.69
5	I feel that things are going my way in my marital life.	54 (13.8)	28 (7.2)	181 (46.4)	87 (22.3)	40 (10.3)	3.08	1.12
6	I find it hard to cope with all the tasks I need to do in my marriage.	80 (20.5)	121 (31.0)	144 (36.9)	22 (5.6)	23 (5.9)	2.45	1.06
7	I feel anger or frustration due to marital stress.	113 (29.0)	121 (31.0)	110 (28.2)	16 (4.1)	30 (7.7)	2.31	1.16
8	I feel that difficulties are piling up in my marriage to the point that I cannot overcome them.	235 (60.3)	49 (12.6)	81 (20.8)	25 (6.4)	-	1.73	1.00
Weighted Mean Score = 2.68 (53.6%)								

From Table 5, it can be deduced that married couples in the study area considered their level of marital stress to be moderate (mean = 2.68 on a scale of 5; 53.6%). Though, majority (Mean = 3.08, 68%) of the respondents felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities in their marriage, yet, only 45% (2.25) found it difficult to control the important things in their relationship. Additionally, 46% (2.30) felt nervous or stressed about marital issues;

84.8% (4.24) were confident in their ability to handle personal problems; 61.6% (3.08) felt that things are going their way in their marital life; 49% (2.45) found it hard to cope with their tasks, 2.31 (46.2%) felt frustrated due to marital stress, and 34.6% (1.73) felt that difficulties are piling up in their marriage to the point that they cannot overcome them.

Table 6: PPMC showing the relationship between communication, conflict resolution skills, perceived stress and marital health

		Communication patterns	Conflict resolution	Stress
Marital Health	Pearson Correlation	.902**	.489**	-.615**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	390	390	390
	Mean	41.164	38.146	21.441
	Standard Deviation	7.626	5.716	4.229

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

The Table 6 revealed the relationship between communication, conflict resolution skills, perceived stress and marital health.

It was revealed that marital health was found to be related with the spouse's communication patterns ($r = .902$, Mean = 41.164, Std. Dev. = 7.626, $p = .000$), conflict resolution ($r = .489$, Mean = 38.146, Std.

Dev. = 5.716, $p = .000$), perceived stress ($r = -.615$, Mean = 21.441, Std. Dev. = 4.229, $p = .000$).

Discussion of findings

The outcome of this study revealed a good, encouraging and satisfactory level of marital health among married couples. This is because the

participants of this study were highly satisfied and adjusted in their marriages. Additionally, they have high quality marriage. This result is similar to the findings of Makinde and Ayeyika¹⁹, Ayodele and Ogunsanwo¹⁰ that marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and relational quality were good correlates of marital health. Okesina²⁰ reported a high levels of marital adjustment reported among married people in Ilorin, Nigeria. The study by Abiodun et al²¹ showed that emotional intelligence is a critical component of marital satisfaction among Christian couples, while Nouri et al²² further supports this viewpoint by finding that a significant portion of married women reported high to very high levels of marital satisfaction.

On the communication patterns and conflict resolution skills among married couples, it was reported that the level of communication was high. This reflects on their open discussion of feelings, listening skills, comfortable expression, clear communication, and respects for others opinions. This result is in tandem with previous empirical study that communication is a critical factor strongly associated with marital satisfaction and stability^{14, 23, 24, 25}. Higher marriage satisfaction generally translates into more positive communication between partners. In order to prevent unpleasant encounters, some couples actively work to avoid them and use constructive communication techniques. Couples facing unresolved issues and distress are particularly susceptible to developing harmful and destructive communication.²⁶ These patterns are difficult to overcome and often lead to a decline in intimacy within the relationship. In contrast, couples who engage in collaborative problem-solving demonstrate greater resilience and achieve higher levels of marital satisfaction.²⁷

The result on the level of marital stress was moderate as less than average of the respondents found it difficult to control the important things in their relationship, felt nervous or stressed about marital issues; found it hard to cope with their tasks, felt frustrated due to marital stress, and that difficulties are piling up in their marriage to the point that they cannot overcome them. This could also be as a result of financial challenges, work-life balance, or unmet expectations. The outcome of this study corroborates the findings of previous study of Bhargava and Trivedi²⁸, Kelley et al²⁹, Landsbergis et al.³⁰

Additionally, communication, conflict resolution skills, perceived stress were found to be related to marital health. This similar to the findings of Aseka et al³¹ who found a strong positive correlation between effective communication and marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Nairobi County, Kenya. Also, Alipour et al²³ reported that

strong communication fosters emotional connection, enhances conflict resolution, and ultimately promotes overall relationship stability. However, stress was found to significantly predicts marital health. This finding is highly expected, given that existing literature often highlights a negative correlation between stress and marital satisfaction.³² Stress level as perceived by most respondents was related to marital health.³³ Studies indicate that stress negatively correlates with relationship quality, as heightened tension often leads to increased conflicts, emotional withdrawal, and dissatisfaction.^{34, 35}

Conclusion

Sequel to the findings of this study, it is concluded that most couples in the study area reported high levels of marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and marital quality. The overall marital health of couples was generally good, with most respondents demonstrating high levels of effective communication and conflict resolution skills. It is also concluded that marital stress was generally low among couples. Furthermore, communication, conflict resolution skills, and stress were significantly related to marital health.

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