

## **PROBLEMS FACED BY STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN ORDINARY PAKISTANI SCHOOLS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The intent of this empirical work was to explore problems faced by students with special needs (SWSN) studying in general education schools/ordinary schools in Pakistan. SWSN, their parents and their teachers were source of information for this study. The number of SWSN who participated in this study was 89 from 72 different families. Out of these 89 students, 54 had physical impairments, 23 had hearing impairments and 12 visual impairments. Data were collected from the SWSN, their parents and teachers. Both parents and students indicated that general education schools are better places for SWSN than the special schools. All groups of participants agreed that there were structural problems faced by students with special needs in general education schools. Classmates of SWSN were found to have positive attitude towards them. Implications of what this means in terms of special education delivery services in Pakistan are further explored. A positive attitude of teachers and society is needed to eradicate the problems faced by SWSN. Along with the help of other stakeholders and adopting different measures, media can play a very vital role in advocacy movements for awareness about the SWSN problems and their solutions.*

**Keywords:** *Students with special needs, ordinary schools, inclusive education.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is located in South Asia neighboring India on its east, China on the far north east, Afghanistan and Iran on the west and the Arabian Sea on the south, covering an area of 796,095 km<sup>2</sup> (340,403 square miles) with a population of 163.76 million inhabitants with a 1.73% population growth rate (Ministry of Commerce, 2009; Ministry of Finance, 2009). The preschool (Pre-Nursery/Play Group/Kindergarten/Nursery & Prep *i.e.* Katchi & Pakki grades) and primary school (1-5 grades) age population is 27,552,000 (male=14,163,000, female=13,389,000). There are 158,378 primary schools with 17,043,460

students and 447,890 teachers in Pakistan for students without a disability (Pakistan, 2008). The prevalence of disability in Pakistan as estimated in the 5<sup>th</sup> population census conducted in 1998 by the Government of Pakistan is projected in Table 1. It shows the common terminology used for the categories of special persons in Pakistan along with their population. The 6<sup>th</sup> population census is in progress since 2011 and hopefully it will be completed at the end of this year.

Approximately, 2.54% of the population is identified as having a disability. There are 531 organizations which cater to the needs of persons with disabilities. Out of these, 423 organizations (79.7%) are providing educational services to the persons with disabilities (Hameed, 2006).

*Table 1: The distribution (%) of disability on the basis of the type of disability and gender*

Nature of disability	All Areas			Rural			Urban		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Blind	8.06	7.61	8.68	7.92	7.44	8.59	8.32	7.93	8.88
Deaf & Mute	7.43	7.27	7.66	7.53	7.40	7.71	7.24	7.02	7.56
Crippled*	18.93	19.84	17.65	20.52	21.40	19.30	15.81	16.83	14.34
Insane**	6.39	6.22	6.63	5.94	5.72	6.23	7.28	7.18	7.44
Mentally Retarded	7.60	7.02	8.41	7.32	6.78	8.07	8.15	7.50	9.62
With multiple disabilities	8.23	7.33	9.48	8.23	7.37	9.41	8.22	7.25	9.60
Unclassified	43.36	44.71	41.49	42.55	43.89	40.69	44.97	46.29	43.07
Overall	2.54	2.85	2.21	2.52	2.83	2.19	2.59	2.88	2.26

(Source: Pakistan Population Census 1998), (\*Physically disabled, \*\* Mentally ill)

Persons with special needs are seen everywhere in the world with different socio economic status because there are no restricted boundaries for the prevalence of disability in terms of geographical borders or societal categorization, gender or socio economic characteristics. It is a common feature all over the civilized world that society observes noble cause of education, rehabilitation and other support programs for all the persons with special needs. Celebration of year of Disabled Person 1981 under the umbrella of United Nations is a mile stone for the awareness about the needs, problems and prospects for the persons with special needs. Aligned with this international initiative, Government of Pakistan took serious steps for the betterment of persons with special needs by establishing different ministries, institutes and formulating specific

policies for the persons with special needs. For example The Directorate General of Special Education was established at federal level to manage and look after the affairs of institutions and organizations working for betterment, uplift and welfare of persons with special needs in the country. This program was shifted to the provincial level for ensuring proper delivery of services at door steps.

Public and private organizations came forward in the field for performing this noble duty. In Pakistan this major development was observed in 1980s. To provide legal cover and continuity in this field, policy development was started in 1985 and finally first National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was approved in 2002. For the true implementation and translation of this policy into action a National Plan of Action (NPA) was presented in 2006 at national level. This policy concentrated on a wide range of services like education, medical care, assessment, vocational training, rehabilitation, employment, advocacy, early intervention, research and development, provision of funds, designing parks, buildings and other public places to meet the needs of persons with special needs (Pakistan, 2002). This policy was a breakthrough in the history of special education in Pakistan. Provincial governments were sensitized by the Federal Government for taking initiatives for children with special needs to provide them the educational services. As a result a separate Department of Special Education was established in Punjab province (*i.e.* province with 60% population of the total population) of Pakistan. Special education centers were established in all areas of Punjab to cater four types of special need children (*i.e.*) hearing impaired/deaf, visually impaired/blind, physically impaired and mentally retarded. For the motivation of teachers they were given the double salaries as compared to the general education teachers. At national level different studies were being conducted under the supervision of Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE) Pakistan to assess the needs and provisions of services and facilities to people with special needs.

Prior to NPA, only four institutions; Institute for Blind Sheranwala Gate; Lahore (1906), IDARIEU School for the Deaf and Blind, Karachi (1920); Mental Health Mission School, Peshawar (1940); and School for the Blind, Bahawalpur (1943) were providing services in the area of special education in the territories now included in Pakistan. From 1947-1960, only five organizations were added in this field. In the following two

decades 1961- 1980, forty five new organizations were added. But after 1980, remarkable improvements and developments were available to be seen resulting in the form of 531 organizations working for the persons with special needs in different domains (Hameed, 2006). So with the passage of time the services were improved for persons with special needs. These improvements started in 1980s because a child of the then President of Pakistan was having special needs and Pakistan also celebrated the year 1981 as International Year of Disabled Persons.

Despite this rapid increase in the number of organizations serving this community, education and training of SWSN remained a serious concern for experts, policy makers and the field staff. Besides the question of *'How to teach?'* the focus was shifted to a new question *'Where to teach?'* These questions led experts to new dimensions of equity and equality in the field of education for children with special needs. The move from segregated to mainstream and then to inclusive education settings is going on with the mission to provide educational services to this segment of society to make them useful and independent citizens (Ainscow, 2005; Ali, Mustapha & Jelas, 2006; Mason, 2005). Teachers working in ordinary, special and inclusive schools have different opinion about educational means and mode of training for children with special needs (Dupoux, Hammond & Ingalls, 2006; Sarwar & Asgher, 2005). There are a number of barriers for the inclusion of SWSN in ordinary schools such as: Negatives attitudes of society towards education of SWSN; physical barriers creating inaccessibility to students with physical disabilities; rigid, inflexible and centrally designed curriculum; abilities and attitudes of teachers; second language as a mode of communication; socio-economic factors; lack of funding for infrastructure and teaching learning materials; and education policies of the country in practice (Torreno, 2011; UNESCO, 2011). School policy, teacher's competency to handle SWSN, availability of resources and support matters a lot (Hodkinson, 2006; Miles, 2000).

Generally Pakistani teachers working in ordinary schools have no exposure to SWSN. They are not well aware of their needs, challenges and potentials. This component is also missing from their pre-service and on job trainings (Atique & Mushtaq, 2005; Bashir, 2005; Hameed, 2002; Shakir, 2003). These challenges are manifested by teachers, society, school authorities and parents (Clough & Garner, 2003; Foster, Long & Snell, 1999; Pivik, McComas & Laflamme, 2002; Stanviloff, 2002).

Sreenath (2011) stated that “it is widely recognized that segregated education that was being largely followed the world over during the eighties and early nineties has not brought about the desired results. It is believed that more than 80 million physically challenged children worldwide have been systematically excluded from mainstream education while 90% of the children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend schools (p.1)”.

In Pakistan too there are also two main kinds of schools: Ordinary schools/general education schools and Special education schools. Ordinary schools are meant to accommodate all children irrespective of any special need but special schools are only catering the educational needs of children with special needs. These special schools are available only in big cities whereas the ordinary schools are everywhere in urban, sub urban and rural areas. These schools also educate students with special needs due to non availability of special schools in the vicinity. It was assumed that most of the children with special needs are accommodated by the ordinary schools due to the high prevalence of ordinary schools. In addition to all efforts made to cope with the needs of persons with special needs, yet the number and the geographical spread of special schools is not sufficient to provide the educational services at their door steps. As the persons with special needs are widely scattered in all parts of the country, it is impossible for the authorities to establish special education schools in all villages and urban localities. Children belonging to the area or region in the vicinity of the special education school approach it but mostly SWSN join general education school/ordinary school nearby in the company of their other siblings.

Within the historical context and current delivery model of educational services of students with special needs, the main purpose of this study was to explore the problems faced by SWSN studying in ordinary schools in Pakistan as perceived by students with special needs, their parents and teachers. The differences in their opinions were also analyzed. It was the high time to answer these questions when the world community is moving towards inclusive education approach that what are the problems faced by SWSN studying in ordinary schools in the opinion of SWSN, their parents and teachers? Secondly, is there any difference in the opinion of SWSN, their parents and teachers regarding problems faced by SWSN in ordinary schools? This study is of great significance because SWSN, their parents and teachers were surveyed to trace out the actual

problems faced by SWSN at school. This study will be helpful for parents, teachers and policy makers to address the problems of the SWSN. It is also expected that the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the domain of teaching and training of SWSN in inclusive education schools. It is also first effort to unfold the perceptions of parents and teachers of children with special needs about feelings of their kids studying in ordinary schools.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This descriptive study was delimited to SWSN, their parents and teachers from state run elementary boys' schools in the metropolitan city of Lahore, Pakistan. There is a large number of commonalities in the culture, policy and the infrastructure of the public sector schools in Pakistan because these are governed by the same set of rules and regulation. Schools from this metropolitan city were selected because these are almost equipped with basic amenities, resources and support staff. Furthermore, it was assumed that teachers and parents belonging to metropolitan city might offer enlighten views and has more awareness than the people residing in small towns or villages about the services provided to SWSN.

For this research 34 out of 69 elementary schools were identified purposefully with SWSN. As the number of SWSN in ordinary schools was very low, only 89 SWSN were identified from all the selected schools. Among these 89 participants, 54 were physically impaired, 23 were hearing impaired and 12 were with visual impairment. These sample students belonged to 72 families. The number of teachers teaching to these sample students was 135. After identification of the sample, the students and teachers were contacted at schools for data collection through questionnaire. With the help of students their parents were contacted at their homes and were surveyed by using the questionnaire. The parents of SWSN were very excited to know that a study is being conducted to identify the problems of their kids at schools. This may be due to the fact that usually in Pakistani culture parents are not contacted to get insight about their children in ordinary as well as special education schools.

All respondents were surveyed for getting their opinion. In the light of related literature, a questionnaire based on five point Likert scale was

developed by the researcher to collect information on problems faced by the SWSN in ordinary schools. The questionnaire comprised of 18 statements followed by five options ranging from ‘Almost always’ to ‘Never’. This questionnaire consisted of three components; attitudinal problems (item 1 to 6), structural problems (item 7 to 11) & educational/organizational problems (item 12 to 18). The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of this questionnaire was found as 0.9254. Values of reliability coefficient for its components were (attitudinal problems) 0.8901, (structural problems) 0.8473 and (educational/organizational problems) 0.7928 respectively. The descriptive statistics was applied for analysis of data.

## RESULTS

Data were treated and analyzed by using SPSS 16 which revealed the following results.

**Table 2: Opinion of Teachers, Students and Parents regarding Problems faced by SWSN**

Sr.	Problems	Students N=89 (M <sub>1</sub> )	Teachers N=135 (M <sub>2</sub> )	Parents N=72 (M <sub>3</sub> )
<b>Attitudinal Problems</b>				
1.	Students with special needs can become active members of society	3.9 (1.414)	4.1 (1.513)	4.4 (1.414)
2.	Parents prefer their children without a disability over their child with special needs	4.4 (0.780)	4.1 (1.149)	1.4 (1.493)
3.	Teachers prefer students without a disability over SWSN	4.5 (1.085)	2.9 (1.297)	4.7 (1.025)
4.	Class/school mates have discriminatory attitude with SWSN	1.0 (0.828)	1.9 (1.289)	2.4 (1.482)
5.	Students with special needs feel inferiority complex in ordinary school	1.5 (0.858)	4.1 (1.042)	1.1 (1.378)
6.	Ordinary school suits best to children with special needs better than special school	4.5 (1.146)	2.9 (1.214)	4.7 (1.320)
<b>Structural Problems</b>				
7.	School buildings are disabled friendly	1.0 (1.376)	1.6 (1.509)	1.4 (0.711)
8.	SWSN can move easily in the classrooms	1.9 (1.322)	4.6 (1.412)	3.0 (1.362)

Sr.	Problems	Students N=89 (M <sub>1</sub> )	Teachers N=135 (M <sub>2</sub> )	Parents N=72 (M <sub>3</sub> )
9.	Class rooms are arranged to provide the ease for SWSN	1.7 (1.454)	4.5 (1.316)	2.9 (0.954)
10.	SWSN have problems in easy access to basic amenities in school	4.3 (1.451)	2.7 (1.201)	3.1 (1.455)
11.	Overcrowded classrooms are the cause of restricted mobility for the SWSN	4.9 (1.377)	1.9 (1.415)	3.9 (1.097)
<b>Educational/ Organizational Problems</b>				
12.	Teachers plan lessons to meet the needs of SWSN	1.7 (1.450)	4.8 (1.362)	3.1 (0.677)
13.	Curriculum is in accordance with the needs of SWSN	1.7 (1.113)	1.2 (1.438)	2.9 (0.934)
14.	Teachers are skillful for handling SWSN	1.0 (1.483)	1.7 (1.370)	2.0 (0.627)
15.	Teachers have different ways to communicate with SWSN	1.9 (1.414)	2.0 (1.493)	1.9 (0.775)
16.	Students with special needs face problems in note taking during the class	4.9 (1.316)	3.6 (1.385)	2.8 (1.170)
17.	SWSN are given preference in academic activities	1.0 (0.676)	4.4 (1.404)	2.0 (1.360)
18.	Examination system is encouraging for SWSN	1.0 (0.865)	1.9 (1.451)	2.5 (1.359)

*(Almost always=5, Often=4, Sometimes=3, Seldom=2, Never=1; M<sub>1</sub>=Mean of Students' perceptions, M<sub>2</sub>=Mean of Teachers' perceptions, M<sub>3</sub>=Mean of Parents' perceptions, SD is given in parenthesis in each cell below the mean respective mean value)*

Table 2 shows the results of the administered questionnaire for all participants in this study. Students with special needs were of the opinion that parents (M<sub>1</sub>=4.4) and teachers (M<sub>1</sub>=4.5) prefer children without a disability over them but teachers (M<sub>2</sub>=2.9) and parents (M<sub>3</sub>=1.4) denied this fact. Teachers (M<sub>2</sub>=4.1) said that parents ignore and parents (M<sub>3</sub>=4.7) said that teachers prefer children without a disability over SWSN. This is the reflection of normal social attitude because in Pakistani society there are only a few job opportunities for special persons. In this context the normal children get more and more attention of their parents and teachers as compared to the SWSN.

All respondents (M<sub>2</sub>=4.1, M<sub>1</sub>= 3.9, M<sub>3</sub>= 4.4) accepted that students with special needs can become active members of the society. Students (M<sub>1</sub>=4.5) and their parents (M<sub>3</sub>= 4.7) felt that the ordinary school suits best to children with special needs better than special school. In response to



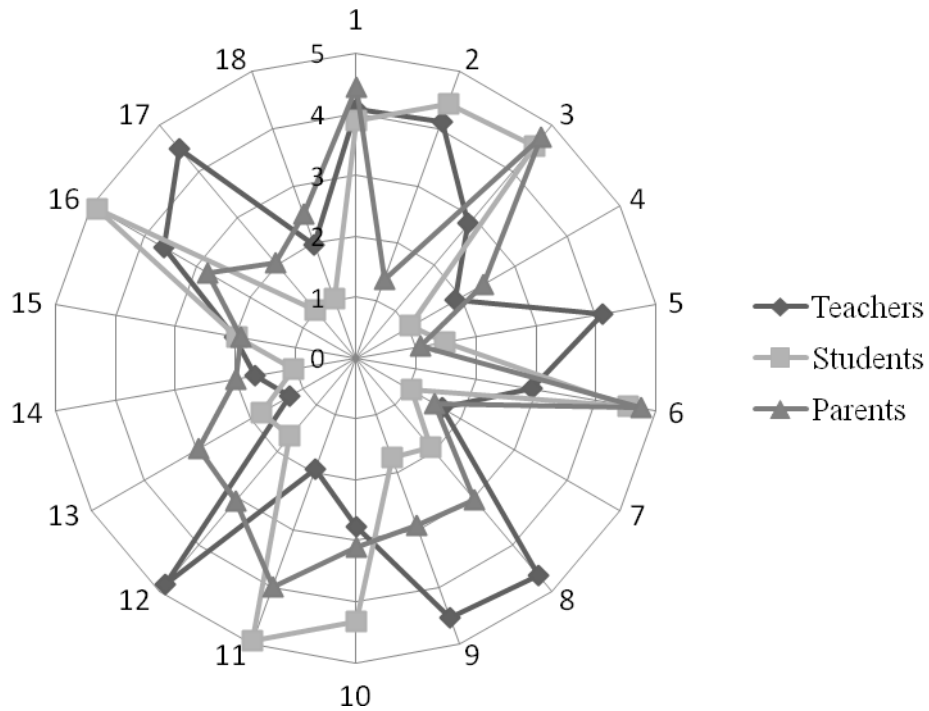
this statement teachers ( $M_2=2.9$ ) seemed mute. In the opinion of SWSN ( $M_1= 1.0$ ) their teachers ( $M_2=1.9$ ) and parents ( $M_3=2.4$ ) witnessed that class fellows and school mates of the children with special needs have no discriminatory attitude with their special fellows. SWSN ( $M_1=1.5$ ) and their parents ( $M_3=1.1$ ) reported that students with special needs did not feel any inferiority complex in ordinary school but the teachers ( $M_2=4.1$ ) were in contrast to them. Generally the SWSN are not looked down upon by their peers in society. More over people feel piety upon them. They care them and help them. So in ordinary school the normal peers take care of their SWSN fellows. They help them in their work and in the leisure times.

For structural problems SWSN ( $M_1=1.0$ ), their teachers ( $M_2=1.6$ ) and parents ( $M_3=1.4$ ) have unanimous opinion that buildings of ordinary schools were not disabled friendly. SWSN couldn't move easily ( $M_1=1.9$ ) due to overcrowded classrooms ( $M_1=4.9$ ) and ignorance towards their arrangements ( $M_1=1.7$ ) to provide the ease for SWSN. Teachers have opposite opinion to students for the statements that 'SWSN can move easily in the classrooms' and 'overcrowded classrooms are the cause of restricted mobility for the SWSN'. Data analysis also revealed that parents ( $M_3=3.9$ ) of SWSN felt that overcrowded classrooms was a problem for free mobility of SWSN (Table 2).

Students with special needs disagreed with the statements that teachers plan lessons to meet the needs of SWSN ( $M_1=1.7$ ), curriculum is in accordance with the capabilities of all types of students ( $M_1=1.7$ ), teachers are skillful for handling students with special needs ( $M_1=1.0$ ), teachers are with variety of modes to communicate with SWSN ( $M_1=1.9682$ ), SWSN are given preference in academic activities ( $M_1=1.0$ ) and examination system is encouraging for SWSN ( $M_1=1.0$ ). They also endorsed that students with special needs face problems in note taking during the class ( $M_1=4.9$ ). Teachers have different opinion than students on the statements that 'teachers plan lessons to meet the needs of SWSN' ( $M_2=4.8$ ) and did not ignore them during classroom activities ( $M_2=4.4$ ). Parents gave the impression that they were not well aware of the educational or organizational functioning in schools (Table 2; Figure 1). All three parties have similar opinion about 'inability of curriculum to accommodate all students'; 'deficiency of training for teachers of ordinary schools to handle SWSN' and 'inappropriateness of examination system'. Above analysis shows that almost all respondents seemed to be on the same page

regarding problems faced by SWSN in ordinary schools. However a slight difference on some statements is also observed. The standard deviations (SD) in Table 2 show the consistencies and the dispersions in the perceptions of the respondents at different factors.

Figure 1 indicated the pictorial description of overall responses of the respondents on three subscales. Figure 1 indicates the similarities and the differences in the opinion of SWSN, their parents and teachers. For example their opinions coincide on the statement 1 and differ on the statement 18. The other statements can also be seen clearly in the Figure 1 because it shows the coincidence of the opinion very clearly.



*Figure 1: Pictorial description of responses of SWSN, their Parents and Teachers*

The answer of the first question is that the problems faced by the SWSN in ordinary schools are attitudinal, structural and the organizational in nature. The intensity of responses on some statements is more than the others. The analysis gave the answer to the second question that there are some similarities and some differences in opinion regarding problems faced by the SWSN in ordinary schools.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to explore the problems faced by SWSN studying in ordinary schools in Pakistan as perceived by students with special needs, their parents and teachers. With this objective in mind, the author recognizes that physical access is the basic need of all the students to be the part of learning and social experiences. Students can be benefited from the nurturing situation when they are free from physical, attitudinal, psychological barriers and socio economic threats. The presence of such threats denied the full participation of marginalized group of children from their basic right "education". Teachers play a tremendous role for ensuring the equitable learning experiences to the children with disabilities. This study was an effort to unfold the opinions of students with disabilities studying in the general education schools. Their parents' and teachers' perceptions in this regard were also valued to understand the phenomenon concerning the problems faced by children with special needs in the general education schools in Pakistan. General education schools/ordinary schools are not bound under the policy to accommodate children with disabilities but they are offering their generous support to this community. Teacher working in such schools have not been trained to address the needs of special schools but besides this they welcome SWSN in their classes. Lack of awareness and psychological impressions parents and teachers prefer the children without a disability over the SWSN because they feel that SWSN could not participate in common activities as was found by Advani (2002). Classmates of SWSN in the general education classrooms have positive attitude towards their special friends. It is a very positive sign of change. The most important and encouraging fact is that all the three stakeholders believe that the general education schools are the best place for education of SWSN.

Overall impression of the three sample groups differ on some of the aspects asked to them. Structural barriers were obvious because buildings were not specially designed to accommodate SWSN (Pivik, McComas, & Laflamme, 2002). The problems faced by SWSN in ordinary schools may include "lack of proper understanding of the concept of inclusion, societal attitudes, poverty, insufficient government leadership, non-availability and quality of human and material resources, fragmented approaches, lack of appropriate role models involved in the process such as Disabled

People's Organizations (DPOs); and lack of adequate confidence building programs for children with disabilities" (Sight Savers, 2011, p.2). Mostly the structural problems were beyond the reach of teachers because these can be removed by the Governmental policy and the provision of funds for adequate buildings.

Teachers can be the best lever to bring change in the attitude of the masses towards the children with special needs. Their training can bring a positive change in the school culture (Destefano, Shriner, & Lloyd, 2001). If most of the SWSN feel comfort and progress in the general education classroom then it will be a positive step towards inclusion (Stainback & Stainback, 1995). They have to lead the society with the active support of parents of the children with special needs. Educational problems can be handled with the help of teachers by providing them proper training. It needs the revision of scheme of studies of the teacher training programs. The problems in inclusion of SWSN in ordinary schools can be eradicated by developing positive attitude of teachers and society towards SWSN, making curriculum relevant and flexible to respond the needs of SWSN, adopting success oriented assessment systems, involving community and family in the education of SWSN, and changing the current policy's focus from segregated education to inclusive education system. It needs a strong political commitment to adopt the inclusive philosophy (UNESCO, 2011a). Media can play an important role in the advocacy and awareness move in connection with the problems faced by SWSN and their solution. Problems faced by SWSN should be taken as an eye opener for the elimination of barriers to make the whole improved by addressing student diversity. These problems are not to be fixed but be taken as opportunity for experimentation to design effective measure (Ainscow, 2008).

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