

Alternative Childcare Arrangement of Working Mothers in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, Ghana

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Abstract

This research identifies alternative childcare arrangements of working mothers with children aged 0-3 in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis and examines factors that influence mothers' choice of alternative childcare. The research design is a descriptive survey. The population for the study constitutes working mothers with children aged 0-3 years, who were teachers, nurses, bankers, traders, seamstresses, and hairdressers in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. One hundred and fifty (150) respondents were conveniently sampled and a purposive sampling technique is used to select four Reproductive and Child Health Centers. The study results indicated that working mothers use relative and non-relative care as alternative childcare arrangements and considered good quality child care and trustworthiness of caregivers as important factors influencing their choice of alternative childcare. This research only examines alternative childcare choices of 150 working mothers who are teachers, nurses, bankers, hairdressers, seamstresses, and traders. The practical implication from this study is that alternative childcare arrangements selected and used by working mothers depict their family structure, ages, number of children, monthly earnings, and the kind of work they do. The working mothers should develop a good relationship with caregivers to ensure that children are not abused in their absence.

KEYWORDS: WORKING MOTHERS; MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT; CHILDCARE; ALTERNATIVE CHILDCARE; CHILDREN

Introduction

Over the last century, many countries have experienced a significant rise in female labour force participation, especially women with young children. In Ghana, the 2010 Population and Housing Census revealed that 54.8% of Ghanaian women are economically active, as compared to 50.1% in the 2000 Population and Housing Census Report, 51% in 1984, 47% in 1970, and 39% in 1960 Population Census (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2010). Additionally, the Ghana Statistical Service Census Data puts females in public sector employment at 4.5%; 4.2% for females in the private formal sector and 90.9% for females in private informal sector employment (GSS, 2010).

Deacon and Firebaugh (1988) classed employment demands and household work performance of couples into traditional, additive, transitional, and reversed traditional roles. Within the traditional society, roles for both men and women have been stereotyped. Women are responsible for performing household and family work such as childcare, cooking, washing, cleaning, and managing the family. Traditional roles of women kept them at home and attracted no wage gain. However, as society evolved, there has been a shift from the traditional roles to additive and transitional roles. The additive roles enable women to maintain their traditional roles and add a new dimension; which is a gainful economic activity outside the home while the transitional roles allow for division of household labour among couples.

Women and mothers have for centuries been economically active the world over. Maatta (2008) states that "African women especially those from Ghana and Zambia in the 1950s and 1970 were the most

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economically active when compared to other African countries” (p. 55). However, they could still attend to childcare needs because without needing alternative childcare because the economic activities revolved around household production. Hansen et al. (2006) explain the concept of maternal employment as the engagement of mothers within the labour force while they are still caring for children aged 0-13 years. In Ghana, maternal employment cuts across both formal and informal employment and is either within the public or private sector. Formal sector employment in Ghana is regulated by the Labour Act (651) of 2003 which provides general work conditions for workers including women, their leave entitlements during pregnancy and after birth. The Labour Act (2003 §§ 1-3) states:

A woman worker, on the production of a medical certificate issued by a medical practitioner or midwife indicating the expected date of her confinement, is entitled to a period of maternity leave of at least twelve weeks in addition to any period of annual leave she is entitled after her period of confinement.

The period of maternity leave may be extended for at least two additional weeks where the confinement is abnormal or where in the course of the same confinement two or more babies are born.

However, the informal sector in Ghana which employs the majority of working mothers is not regulated by any labour law thus periods of respite after childbirth is determined by workers themselves or their employers.

Childcare is an umbrella term referring to any form of non-parental care that occurs on a regular basis (Huston et al., 2002). It is when a child is supervised and cared for by a non-parent or caregiver. A World Bank Report (2001) states that expanded income-earning activities of women in Ghana is requiring them to increase their use of available alternative childcare arrangements, which ranges from relative care to enrolment in childcare centers. Karpilow (1999) defines alternative childcare as care by a relative such as a grandmother or an aunt; in-home care by non-relatives such as a babysitter or nanny; and care in group settings such as centers and family child care homes. Similarly, Kimmel (2006) categorized childcare choices into five composite modes of care namely parental care, relative care, nanny or baby sitter care, non-relative care, and center-based care.

According to the Gender Database of the World Bank (2001), several factors influence the demand for various types of alternative childcare arrangements in Ghana. These factors include the nature of the mother’s work, place of work (in her home or remote location), number and ages of children, and income levels.

Problem definition

Maternal employment and childcare are important research areas the world over because of the effects on both mother and child. Observation in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis of the Western Region of Ghana, reveals that most of the economically active women are in their childbearing age. The fundamental question that needs answers is, who cares for their children while they work?

Research objective

The objective of this study is to identify the alternative childcare arrangements used by working mothers with children aged between 0-3 years and examine the factors that influence working mothers’ choice of alternative childcare in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis.

Research questions

1. What are the alternative childcare arrangements used by working mothers with children aged between 0-3 years in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis?
2. What are the factors that influence working mothers’ choice of alternative childcare arrangements in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis?

Theoretical Framework

Preferences and Constraints Model

This model of childcare selection by Casper and Smith (2004) was developed from Becker's (1981) model of household production. The model states that families make decisions about their welfare subject to their constraints and preferences. This theory argues that parents weigh their preferences for different types of childcare services against competing preferences such as things that could be purchased with the money used for childcare and constraints such as time, money, employment schedules among others. The "Preference and Constraints" model emphasizes the economic costs and benefits mothers derive from using alternative childcare. Emlen (1998) states that parents' satisfaction is not predicted by the type of care, the intensity of care, or observable quality of care, but instead by the amount of flexibility the mothers have in the workplace and family, in relation to the alternative care arrangements chosen.

Notwithstanding assumptions of the theory, parents may prefer a care center with a focus on the developmental outcome of the child. However, if such alternative childcare is too expensive or not available to provide childcare during the parents' working hours, the family may choose relative care, which is relatively less expensive and provides care during non-traditional hours (i.e., at night, in the evening, and weekends).

The Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological System Theory otherwise known as Human Ecology theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), states that human development is influenced by different types of environmental systems. Personal characteristics of family members and the developing child are viewed as important elements in understanding parental behaviours in relation to child care choices. Bronfenbrenner (2002) identified five levels of ecosystems within the ecological system that are interconnected and are hierarchical namely; micro-system, meso-system, macro-system, exo-system, and chrono-system.

The micro-system encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with the immediate surroundings such as the family, peer group, school, neighbours, teachers, caregivers. Interrelations between two or more micro systems such as parents and caregivers, children, and the school constitute the child's meso-system whereas the exo-system is an interaction between the micro and meso systems of a child's environment. Berk (2000) describes the macro system as the actual culture of the child. He explains that the macro-system encompasses values, customs, and beliefs of the community and society which defines the totality of a growing child. The ecological system is an active system, which is constantly developing and evolving. The chrono-system includes change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also the environment in which that person lives. Examples of these changes are divorce, change in socioeconomic status, change in employment such as retirement or redundancy, and change in place of residence.

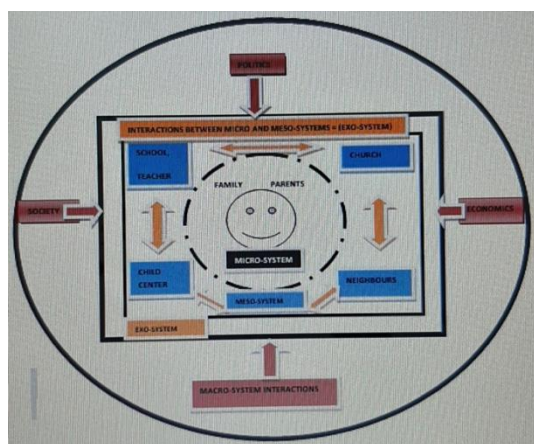


Figure 1 Ecological Systems Theory of Alternative Childcare Choice (Kumatia, 2014 p. 21)

Concept of Childcare and Alternative Childcare

Childcare is an umbrella term referring to any form of non-parental care that occurs on a regular basis (Huston et al., 2002). It includes care for a child by persons other than their biological parents such as relatives—grannies, aunties, sisters, nannies among others. According to Olson (2002 p.10), childcare also means “caring for and supervising a child or children, usually from newborn to age thirteen either by a parent or non-parent”. Again, Youcha (1995 p. 13) defines childcare as “services which include actions or skills of looking after children by a day-care center, babysitter, or other providers”. The term childcare service is typically linked to care provided by persons other than the child’s parents (Olson, 2002). Youcha (1995) stresses that childcare includes socializing a child into society, putting institutional structures in place to cater to the educational, emotional, and health needs of babies. She said that children of working mothers can be cared for at home by extended family members, babysitters or nannies; outside the home in day-care, preschool, and in educational settings such as early childhood education centers, nursery, and kindergarten.

This research adopts Kimmel’s (2006) categorisation of childcare and thus will categorize childcare types into four types namely:

- center-based care
- family care
- relative care, and
- non-relative care or in-home care.

Factors Influencing Childcare Selection

The choice of child care by families is a complex process that often occurs in conjunction with family decisions about employment (especially mother’s employment). The common economic theory of child care choice argues that families (mothers) will consider both the quality and cost of various non-parental arrangements in maximizing their satisfaction (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). The cost of using parental care is lost wages and this will be weighed against the cost of alternatives and the value associated with different types of childcare care to determine optimal arrangement (Casper & Smith, 2004).

However, sociological and cultural theorists have argued that viewing child care choice from a primarily economic perspective results in the exclusion of many factors that play a critical role in child care choice decisions (Fuller et al., 2002).

In this research, the researcher uses an ecological model to organize and integrate previous research findings on factors that influence a mother’s child care selection. These factors include individual level characteristics such as income, education, race and ethnicity, family structure, employment structure, children’s age, gender, and other characteristics.

Research Methodology

The research design used for the study was a descriptive survey. A survey involves acquiring information about a group by asking questions, tabulating, and describing answers (Jackson, 2009). A major strength of a descriptive survey is its ability to acquire information from a larger sample due to the instruments used to collect data and the flexibility in administering the instruments. This design was chosen to enable the researcher to describe the characteristics of the population by inferring from what was found out about the sampled group and help answer the research questions and the purpose of the study.

The population for the research included all working mothers with children aged between 0-3 years in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis. The target population was categorized into six; comprising teachers, nurses, and bankers who made up working mothers within the formal sector whiles traders, hairdressers and seamstresses made up working mothers within the informal sector. The total sample size used for the research was 150 respondents comprising 25 mothers each from the various occupations selected. 150 was used because it is an ideal sample size considering the research design used for the study. A convenience sampling procedure was used to select working mothers who had children aged 0-3 years. According to Jackson (2009), convenience sampling is a non-probability technique where subjects are selected because of their convenience, accessibility, and proximity to

the researcher. Purposive sampling was used to select four Reproductive and Child Health Care Centers from various hospitals and clinics within the metropolis. According to Creswell (2007), a purposive sampling procedure is also a non-probability sampling technique where the selection of respondents or sites is based on the researcher's interest in characteristics possessed by respondents or the sites. The Reproductive and Child Health Centers (R.C.H.C) selected were the Effia-Nkwanta Regional Hospital, Metro Hospital, Kwesimintim Polyclinic, and New Takoradi Health Center. Respondents were selected using the information in their Child Health Record Booklet and mothers who were employed either as Teachers, Nurses, Bankers, Traders, Seamstresses, and Hairdressers were selected.

The questionnaire for data collection had an introductory part with information about the researcher and the aim of the study. It also assured respondents of ethical issues. The Bio-data section contained five items to elicit responses on mothers' age, marital status, occupation, managerial position, and level of education. Section A helped to elicit information from working mothers on alternative child care arrangements used. It contained six items, starting from 6-11. All six items were close-ended questions. Section B consisted of 12-20 items that were designed to elicit information from mothers on factors influencing their childcare arrangements. It contained 9 items of which 3 were close-ended while 6 were rating or Likert scale questions.

Data collection was done over a six-week period, taking into consideration the scheduled post-natal care dates for the various R.C.H Centers. Questionnaires were completed personally by respondents. For analysis SPSS (Version 16) was used to generate frequencies and make summaries of respondents' responses and for drawing conclusions.

Ethical consideration

The study was approved by the Department of Home Economics Education, University of Education, Winneba in partial fulfilment for the award of a Master's Degree in Home Economics. All respondents were informed and approval sort before responding to the questionnaire. This was contained in a statement on the questionnaire disclosing confidentiality. Also, letters were sent to all Health facilities used for the study seeking their permission.

Results

Table 1 Number and Ages of Respondents' Children

Occupation	Participants' no of children			Ages of children				
	Children per respondent	n respondent	% respondent	0-6 months	7-11 months	1 yr +	2 yrs+	3 yrs
Teachers (N = 25)	1	7	28%	2	1	1	1	2
	2	12	48%	4	2	2	2	2
	3	6	24%	1	2	1	1	1
Nurses (N = 25)	1	15	60%	3	2	1	6	3
	2	9	36%	1	2	1	3	2
	3	1	4%	0	0	0	0	1
Bankers (N = 25)	1	22	88%	4	6	3	7	2
	2	3	12%	0	1	0	0	2
	3	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0
Traders (N = 25)	1	6	24%	0	0	2	1	3
	2	5	20%	0	0	2	1	2
	3	14	56%	0	2	3	0	9
Hairdressers (N = 25)	1	12	48%	2	1	3	4	2
	2	5	20%	0	0	1	1	3
	3	8	32%	0	0	0	3	5
Seamstresses (N = 25)	1	10	40%	2	1	3	2	3
	2	8	32%	1	1	2	1	3
	3	7	28%	0	1	2	1	3
Total		150						

Note: Field data 2014

Table 1 shows that seven teachers (28.0%) had one child, 12 (48.0%) had two children while six (24.0%) had three children. Fifteen (60%) out of 25 nurses had one child, nine (36.0%) had two children, while only one (5.0%) had three children. Similarly, 88.0% of bankers had one child and three (12.0%) said they had two children.

Table 1 shows 14 traders (56.0%) had three children whereas six (24.0%) and five (20.0%) had one and two children respectively. Twelve (48.0%) hairdressers and ten (40.0%) seamstresses had one child each, 5 (20.0%) hairdressers, and eight (32.0%) seamstresses had two children each. Finally, eight (32.0%) hairdressers and seven (28.0%) seamstresses had three children each. This implies that teachers, nurses and bankers representing 50.0% of respondents within the formal sector had children aged between 0-6 months and 2 years respectively. Traders, hairdressers, and seamstress had a majority of their children between the ages of 1 year and 3 years respectively.

Table 2 Where Respondents Leave Their Children While Working

	Teachers		Nurses		Bankers		Traders		Hairdressers		Seamstresses	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Home	4	16	6	24	5	20	4	16	7	28	7	28
Relative's House	8	32	8	32	9	36	7	28	3	12	2	8
Non-relative's House	7	28	11	44	11	44	8	32	5	20	3	12
Work	6	24	0	0	0	0	6	24	10	40	13	52
TOTAL	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100

Note: Field data 2014

Summary of Table 2 results show that 44% each of nurses and bankers and 32% traders left their children in non-relative's house, while hairdressers 40% and seamstresses 52% sent their babies to work. However, about one-third of the teachers left their children in relative's house.

Table 3 Location Where Respondents Leave Their Children

	Teachers		Nurses		Bankers		Traders		Hairdressers		Seamstresses	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Close to work place	12	48	18	72	17	68	15	60	19	76	21	84
In neighbourhood	13	52	7	28	8	32	10	40	6	24	4	16
TOTAL	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100

Note: Field data 2014

Table 3 results show 102 (68%) respondents left their children at locations closer to their places of work rather than the neighborhood in which they resided which recorded 48(32%).

Table 4 Persons Who Care for Children While Mothers Work

	Teachers		Nurses		Bankers		Traders		Hairdressers		Seamstresses	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Husband	2	8	3	12	2	8	3	12	2	8	1	4
Family member	13	52	2	8	9	36	13	52	11	44	14	56
House help/ Nanny/Baby sitter	10	40	20	80	14	56	9	36	12	48	10	40
Friend	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100

Note: Field data 2014

The results show that children of teachers (52%), traders (52%), and seamstresses (56%) were cared for by a family member that is grandmother, aunties, siblings, cousins, and other blood relations (relative care). Nurses (80%), bankers (56%), and hairdressers (48%) employed the services of house-helpers/nannies/babysitters which is known as non-relative or in-home care.

Table 5 How Respondents' Children are Cared for

	Teachers		Nurses		Bankers		Traders		Hairdressers		Seamstresses	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Alone	6	24	2	8	3	12	5	20	8	32	9	36
In a group	19	76	23	92	22	88	20	80	17	68	16	64
TOTAL	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100

Note: Field data 2014

The results show the majority of respondents (78%) claimed their children were cared for in groups with other children and only 22% claimed their children were cared for alone.

Table 6 Factors That Influenced Respondents Choice of Alternative Childcare

		Teachers	Nurses	Bankers	Traders	Hairdressers	Seamstress
Cost of alternative childcare							
Very Important	Freq.	21	20	19	21	19	15
	%	84	80	76	84	76	60
Important	Freq.	4	5	6	4	6	10
	%	16	20	24	16	24	40
Quality of care provided							
Very Important	Freq.	24	24	23	23	21	22
	%	96	96	92	92	84	88
Important	Freq.	1	1	2	2	4	3
	%	4	4	8	24	16	12
Environment or neighborhood in which your child will be cared for							
Very Important	Freq.	18	21	21	22	18	21
	%	72	84	84	88	72	84
Important	Freq.	7	4	4	3	7	4
	%	28	16	16	12	28	16
Distance from home or workplace							
Very Important	Freq.	21	22	22	20	19	20
	%	84	88	88	80	76	80
Important	Freq.	4	3	3	5	6	5
	%	16	12	12	20	24	20
Convenience to mother							
Very Important	Freq.	20	20	20	21	20	21
	%	80	88	80	84	80	84
Important	Freq.	5	5	5	4	5	4
	%	20	20	20	16	20	16
Trust (those who will be caring for children)							
Very Important	Freq.	22	23	21	22	22	18
	%	88	92	84	88	88	72
Important	Freq.	3	2	4	3	3	7
	%	12	8	16	12	12	28

Note: Field data 2014. Options for respondents to choose: *very important* (VI); *important* (I); *not sure* (NS); *less important* (LS); *not important* (NI). However, none of the respondents chose *not sure*, *less important* or *not important*

The results presented show that respondents agreed that all the factors listed above influenced their choice of alternative childcare, however (91%) considered *quality of care provided* as the most important factor while (85%) considered *trust in the people who care for their children* in their absence as the most important factor to be considered.

Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the alternative childcare arrangements used by working mothers with children aged between 0-3 years in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis?

The study depicts that teachers' and traders used relative care outside their homes, while nurses and bankers used non-relative care outside their homes. However, hairdressers used non-relative care but at their workplaces because their children were with them at work and cared for by a nanny, babysitter or house help. Seamstresses, on the other hand, used relative care at their workplaces. Their children were cared for by a family member while they work. Generally, the results show that respondents rely on access to relatives or non-relatives in choosing alternative childcare arrangements. Respondents used home-based care because they had access to relatives or non-relatives, flexible work schedules, and preferred to have their children close to the neighbourhood within which they reside. Teachers, nurses, bankers, and traders used relative and non-relative care as alternative childcare arrangements because it does not conflict with their work schedules. Also, their family structure gave them access to relatives/family support and they had younger and fewer children. However, hairdressers and seamstresses who had control over the nature of their work preferred to send their children to work.

Seo (2003) posits that the ecological system theory of childcare selection by working mothers explains why even better-educated parents would go for relative care within their neighbourhood because there is a relationship between parental beliefs, behaviours, and childcare choices. Again, Johansen et al. (1996) in their study found out that mothers with greater access to relatives or caregivers appear to place less value on the educational aspects of early childhood care. Rodd (1997) also said working nursing mothers mostly prefer their relatives to be with them, consequently, mothers most often leave their children with their family members in the house. According to Han (2004), the ages and number of children a mother also determines what types of alternative childcare to use. He explains that when children are relatively younger parents prefer home-based care because it is difficult to find a center-based care center that will provide all the component childcare. This explains why respondents are using relative care and non-relative care. These findings are consistent with the assumptions of the *preferences and constraints* model that parents choose alternative childcare based on their preferences such as access to relatives or non-relatives (care givers).

Research Question 2: What are the factors that influence working mother's choice of alternative childcare arrangements in Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis?

With regard to the factors that influence working mothers' choice of alternative childcare arrangements in Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis, the study revealed that more than 90% of teachers, nurses, bankers, traders, and seamstresses viewed the quality of care provided for their children as the most important factor that affected their choice of alternative childcare arrangement while hairdressers indicated that trust for those who will be caring for the children. Spodek (1995); Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) in a similar study found out that the quality of child care arrangements was essential to the development of a child. They explain that if this quality is not provided, it affects the effective relationship between the mother and the child. Quality childcare as outlined by Bredekamp and Copple (1997) encompasses several aspects such as responsive caregiving, high staff-to-child ratios, responsive environment, competent staff, cultural and linguistic continuity, primary caregiving among others. These aspects of quality childcare and its rippling effect on childhood development inform mothers' choices.

The responses from respondents give an indication that the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) is the best theory applied in the choice of alternative childcare arrangements. This is because all respondents indicated that the factors were important in their choice of alternative childcare. Ecological systems theory gives a holistic view of childcare choice as outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1994) in his systems level of interaction and interconnectedness.

Fuller et al. (2002) said that in the choice of alternative childcare social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions all come into play and that if the emphasis is laid on economic conditions other important factors will be significantly affected. The ecological systems theory dwells on this assumption and explains human behaviour based on interactions between levels of systems in their environment. Again, on trust in caregivers, the majority of respondents (70%) agreed that it is an essential component in choosing alternative childcare. Spodek (1995) states that human life depends on modelling and emphasized that the caregivers must exhibit trustworthy behaviours for children to emulate and that will influence their future living.

Findings

Teachers used relative care in or outside their own homes; nurses, bankers, and traders used in-home care or non-relative care outside their homes and hairdressers; seamstresses used non-relative care by house helps, baby sitters, or nannies at their places of work.

Quality of care to be provided for children was the most important factor that influenced teachers, nurses, bankers, trader, and seamstresses in their selection of alternative childcare and trust was the most important factor that influenced hairdressers.

Conclusion

The alternative childcare arrangements selected and used by working mothers depict or reflect their family structure, ages and number of their children, and the kind of work they do (the flexibility in their work schedules, access to maternity leaves).

Good quality childcare is an essential component of holistic childcare. It helps mothers to relax and be at ease since they know their children will be well cared for. Additionally, children have all aspects of their development catered for, that is, social, emotional, physical, and psychological.

Recommendations

Working mothers should develop a good relationship with caregivers to ensure that children are not abused in their absence. Mothers must ensure that blood relation or hired caregivers are mature and have enough experience in childcare to provide safe and quality care.

There should be a National Early Childhood Care Policy that will factor in the needs of children aged 0-3 years. This will improve the quality of care to be given, reduce trust issues and the risk of using unqualified caregivers as well as reduce the cost involved in engaging the services of private alternative childcare providers.

Author Biographies

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