

Urban-Rural Variation of Early Marriage among Married Women in Babile Town and Its Environs, Oromiya National Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract

All over the world, within a single day a large number of girls are getting into marriage as early as their childhood without their will and consent. Likewise, in Ethiopia, women tend to marry considerably earlier than men. The objective of this study is to explore the rural-urban variation of early marriage among married women and the causative factors of variation. A cross-sectional research design was adopted, and a total of 385 household heads (HHHs) were randomly selected as samples for this study, i.e. 206 from the urban and 179 from rural kebele. Chi square and binary logistic regression were used to analyze the data. The results of the study revealed that the prevalence of early marriage in Babile town and its environs was 48.8%. The variation among rural and urban women was 61.5% for rural vs. 37.9% for urban. Furthermore, early marriage both in rural and urban areas of the study area was caused by different socio-economic and cultural factors. Accordingly, current age, educational status, parental control, cultural as well as religious influences and ethnicity were the main factors significantly associated with early marriage. Findings from this study demonstrate the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need for the involvement of all actors to address the challenge.

Key words: Babile town, early marriage, urban-rural variation, women

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Introduction

All over the world, within a single day, almost 39,000 girls are getting into marriage at their early ages without their will and consent (AU, 2015a). The same source further contends that out of 41 countries worldwide with a child marriage prevalence rate of 30% or more, 30 are in African Union countries (AU, 2015a). Moreover, in 2010 alone, more than 67 million women who were found in the age brackets of 20 and 24 had been exposed for early marriage in developing countries (AU, 2015b). This is worst in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular. In Ethiopia, women tend to marry considerably earlier than men (CSA, 2017). According to a recent study by Erulkar (2013) one in six young women in Ethiopia had married by the age of 15.

The practice is still prevalent as highly as 63% with various rates across times and regions of Ethiopia, ranging from 12% in Addis Ababa to 58% in Beninshangul-Gumuz (CSA, 2012). Different studies revealed that strong socio cultural influences, family and community perceptions, variations in interpretation of religion, protecting family honor and low access to media are some of the reasons that played role in the continuation of child marriage practice with its different patterns throughout the country (Tatek, 2009; FDRE, 2012; Eshetu and Dula, 2012; Mengistu, 2015).

According to UNFPA (2012), Oromiya is one of the regions in Ethiopia which is highly affected with 41% of prevalence rate of early marriage. The data obtained from the National Committee on Harmful Traditional Practices (NHTP) (1998) showed that Eastern Haraghe, one of the zones in Oromiya region, was as seriously affected as 97% of this incident. Thus, Babile town along with its environs is one of the East Hararghe Woredas' that undoubtedly shares this problem. With the exception of few, the majority of the studies on early marriage in Ethiopia, (see Eshetu and Dula (2012), Boyden *et al.* (2013), UNICEF (2013), ESSP II (2011) and AU (2015b)), treat the subject primarily from the perspectives of health and anthropology— giving little emphasis for the particular geographic spaces. This study, however, focus on the demographics of the rural-urban variation.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to provide additional empirically supported information that contributes to a better understanding of the urban-rural variations of early marriage. The general objective of this study was, therefore, to investigate the urban-rural variation of early marriage among married women. Specifically, the two objectives include: (a) to explore urban-rural variations of early marriage among married women; and (b) to identify factors which cause variations of early marriage between urban and rural residents.

The Study Area and Methods

Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in Babile town and its surrounding, Eastern Hararghe Zone of Oromiya National Regional State. The study area is situated between 9°13'34"N to 9°13'56"N and 42°19'54"E to 42°20'25"E, 565 kilometers away to the East from Addis Ababa and 35 km East of

Harar, the capital of the Eastern Hararghe Zone. The total area of the town is 1094.4 (10.944Km²) with an altitude between 989 m to 1700 m above mean sea level.

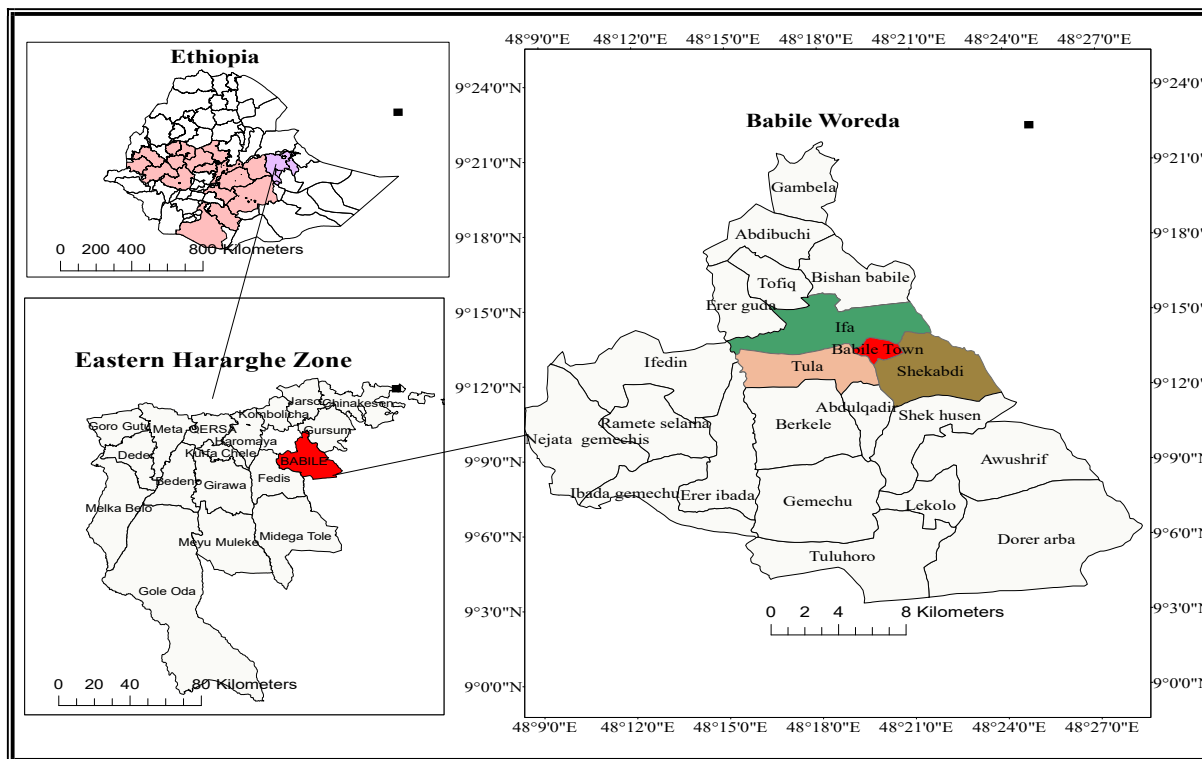


Figure 1: Location of the Study Area

According to CSA (2007), Babile *Woreda* has a total population of 93,674 of which 47,153 were males and 46,521 females. The same source further indicates that rural residents were 75,970 (38,371 males and 37,599 females) and the remaining 17,704 people (8,782 males and 8,922 females) reside in Babile town. According to the town's Finance and Economic Development Office (FED) (2016), currently there are 4,400 heads of households (HHH) engaged in different economic activities i.e. merchants 60%, farmers 10%, civil servants 12%, labor workers 7%, and others 6% in the town. The town is the home of different ethnic groups like Oromo (53%), Somali (26%), Amhara (17%), Guraghe (3%), and others (1%) (FED, 2016). The data acquired from the town administration (2016) shows that, the largest proportion of the residents of the town are adherents of Muslim, Orthodox, Protestant and other religions and constitute 71.0%, 21.0%, 6.0%, and 2.0%, respectively of the total population of the town.

According to the town's municipality (2016), Babile and its environs are characterized by tropical agro-climatic zone that consists of arid and semi-arid climatic conditions. This agro-climatic zone is characterized by high temperature in the afternoon but lower temperature in the early morning because of the absence of cloud cover that can have a moderating impact on the local climate. The town is surrounded by three *kebeles*, namely Tula, Ifa and Shek Abdi as

shown in Figure 1. Almost all of these *kebeles* have similar climatic conditions with the town and its surrounding engaged in agriculture. The main rainy seasons of the *woreda* is the summer season from July to September. However, typically the end of the winter season (i.e., from March to April) marks the beginning of rainfall. The average annual rainfall ranges between 410 mm and 820 mm with 20⁰c to 25⁰c annual range of temperature.

Research Design, Data Sources and Methods of Analysis

A cross-sectional research design was applied to this study. A total of 385 households were selected through simple random sampling and surveyed using structured interview and pre-tested questionnaire. The sample size and profile of household heads interviewed is presented in Table 1 below. Moreover, females and experts with very good knowledge of the marriage practices of the study area were selected purposively for in-depth interviews and focus group discussion (FGD). Accordingly, two groups containing eight participants, four in each, were selected from parents residing in both areas, i.e. rural and urban. Moreover, six key informant interviewees were conducted, taking two from each of the selected sector offices of education, and women and children affairs of the town.

Table 1. Sample size and profile of household respondents in the study area

Characteristics	Sample Size
Number of <i>Kebele</i>	4
Questioned women	385
Percentage of total household	10 %
Age range (years)	15-29
Average age (years)	20.8
Average current age (years)	20-24
Average family size of respondent parents	6.26
Muslim (%)	87.3
Oromo (%)	69.1

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Results and Discussion

Urban-rural Variation of Early Marriage

Geographically, the variation of age at marriage is described in terms of spatial and temporal perspectives. Thus, spatially majority of the rural residents 110 (61.5%) were married below the legal age of marriage (18 years) while the rest of them 69 (38.5%) were married by 18 and above years of their birth. On the other hand, the majority of the urban residents, 78 (37.9%) were married before they celebrate their 18th year of birth which is higher than that of Addis Ababa city (26%) according to UNICEF (2013), while about 128 (62.1%) were married after they have reached at the matured age of marriage as shown in Figure 2. The difference between the capital and the study area was probably due to uneven distribution of different socio economic facilities like availability of family planning facilities and better awareness that enable women to delay their marriage. This result is in agreement with the research conducted in Nigeria by Kyari and

Ayodele (2014) which revealed that girls in urban locations start getting married later than rural girls, and continue getting married until later as well.

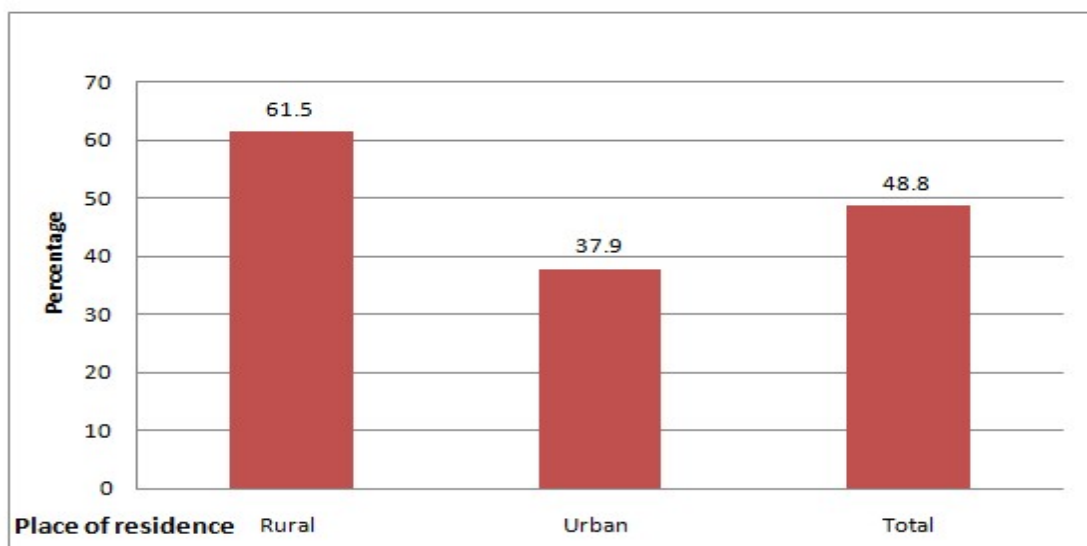


Figure 2: Urban-rural variation of early marriage

Factors Responsible for Urban-rural Variation of Early Marriage Demographic factors and their association with early marriage

Table 2 shows the association between family size of the respondents' parents and early marriage. Accordingly, in rural areas, the majority 49 (81.7%) of the respondents whose parents had 1-4 children, married before 18th years while 61 (51.3%) of those whose parents had 5 and above children were married before 18th year of their ages. The chi square test showed in Table 2 also ascertained that early marriage and family size among the rural respondents of the study areas are statistically significant (X^2 value=15.568, $P=0.000$).

Table 2: Association of early marriage with family size and current age of respondents

Place of Residents	Family size and Current age of Respondents	Age at marriage				X^2	P -Value
		Below 18		18 and above			
		No.	%	No.	%		
Rural	1-4	49	81.7	11	18.3	15.568	0.000*
	5 and more children	61	51.3	58	48.7		
Urban	1-4 children	27	59.9	24	47.1	7.013	0.008*
	5 and more	50	32.3	105	67.7		
Rural	15-19	84	97.7	2	2.3	96.226	0.000*
	20-24	26	32.1	55	67.9		
	25-29	0	0.0	12	100.0		
Urban	15-19	35	87.5	5	12.5	63.289	0.000*
	20-24	42	30.9	94	69.1		
	25-29	0	0.0	30	100.0		

Source: Computed from field survey, 2017, * significant at less than 5% level of confidence

Association of early marriage with Socio economic and cultural factors

Pertaining to educational status of respondents, the finding of this study showed that in rural areas the largest proportion 51 (78.5%) who married before 18 years were not able to read and write, while only few 2 (20%) of rural respondents who married before 18 years were those who attended higher education (Table 3). This finding was higher than the study made by UNICEF (2013) in Ethiopia (30%). This might be due to the fact that the UNICEF data was average of different regions of the country where at times there are large or small values for regions. The result of this study was in line with the study conducted in Nigeria by Ezra (2013) which found that the risk of marrying earlier are lower for women who attain secondary and higher educational levels when compared with those without education.

In urban areas also the proportion of women who married earlier decreased with increasing education level of respondents which were 43 (61.4%), 16 (28.6%) and 5 (10.2%) for primary, secondary and higher education respectively (Table 3). However, in the study area the result showed that 61.4% of those who attended primary school were married before the legal age of marriage, which is higher than that of those who could not read and write (41.9%). This might be because men in urban areas prefer more or less women who can read and write for marriage than those who cannot read and write. This can be evidenced with the finding shown in Table 3 that 78.5% of the rural respondents who cannot read and write and 41.9% of the urban respondents those who cannot read and write respectively were married before the legal age of marriage. This is in agreement with the result of the study by UNICEF (2013) in Mozambique, which revealed that primary education is associated with a higher probability of being married before 18 compared to girls with no education in urban areas, but with a slightly lower probability of being married before 15.

Moreover, the data obtained from the interview held with head of the town's education office supported the above information. Accordingly, she said that:

Educating female children is very important if we want to eliminate early marriage anywhere. Because, the more they stayed in school and push their status of education up, the more they say no to marry early. So, there is no better tool to stop the practice of early marriage than educating women themselves. (Female, 30 years old).

Table 3: Association of Early Marriage with Respondents' Educational Status

Place of Resident	Respondents' Educational Status	Age at marriage				X^2	P -Value
		Below 18		18 an d above			
		No.	%	No.	%		
Rural	Cannot read and write	51	78.5	14	21.5	26.661	0.000*
	Primary	47	64.4	26	35.6		
	Secondary	10	32.3	21	67.7		
	Higher	2	20	8	80		
Urban	Cannot read and write	13	41.9	18	58.1	34.887	0.000*
	Primary	43	61.4	27	38.6		
	Secondary	16	28.6	40	71.4		
	Higher	5	10.2	44	89.8		

Source: Computed from field survey, 2017, *is significant at less than 5% level of significance

The proportion of those who cannot read and write and married earlier in this study were higher than that of the finding of the study conducted by Damte (2010) in Dembia *Woreda* of North Gondar, Amhara Region (88.2%). The difference was probably due to the deep rootedness of the practice of early marriage in Amhara region, which was cited in different previous studies like Kerebih and Mulunesh (2014), Muhabie (2015), and Sileshi (2015).

One of the variables taken as a social factor for the occurrence of early marriage was respondents' parental control. Accordingly, Table 4 depicted that the highest proportion, 68 (72%), of rural respondents who said that their parents do not control them were married before the legal age of marriage while the lowest proportion 42 (49.4%) of those who responded that their parents control them were married earlier before the legal age of marriage. This was statistically significant ($\chi^2=9.906$, $P=0.002$). The result of this study is in agreement with the qualitative result of the study conducted in Kesrsa district of Eastern Hararghe Zone by Wandimiye (2015) which revealed that early marriage is not decreasing as expected due to the cultural dancing and feasting practices known as '*Shegoye*' which is performed at night, especially at an intended marriage ceremony.

On the other hand, the largest proportion, 65 (54.2%), of urban respondents who were married before they reached the age of 18 replied that there were no control of their parents upon them while only the smallest proportion, 12 (14%), of those who were under parental control were married before the legal age of marriage. This was statistically significant ($\chi^2=34.610$, $p\text{-value}=0.000$) as shown in Table 4. The participants of FGD supported this finding. They were asked to give their opinion on the contribution of parental control in early marriage. Accordingly, one of them stated his view as follows:

Most parents in our community do not know where their children spend their time. Children now a day meet each other at "bercha" house (where the youth meet to chew khat). This paves the way for children particularly women to be initiated to marry as early as they are children (Male, 44 years, Rural).

A similar concern was also raised among the rural FGD participants during their discussion. For instance, one of these group participants said that their children are flooding in to early marriage as a result of the night dancing and feasting practices, particularly during different marriage ceremonies (*ibid*).

Table 4: Association of Early Marriage with Parental Control

Place of residency	Influence of parental control	Age at marriage				χ^2	P -Value
		Below 18		18 and above			
		No.	%	No.	%		
Rural	Yes	42	49.4	43	50.6	9.906	0.002*
	No	68	72.3	26	27.7		
Urban	Yes	12	14	74	86	34.610	0.000*
	No	65	54.2	55	45.8		

Source: Computed from field survey, 2017; *is significant at less than 5% level of confidence

The other variable discussed as a responsible factor for the occurrences of early marriage was religion. Thus, Table 5 shows the association of context of early marriage and ethnicity by their place of residence. Accordingly, both in rural and urban areas the largest proportion 8 (100%) and 5 (71.4%) of respondents who were married earlier were ethnically Argoba while very smallest proportion, 1 (25%) and 7 (26.9%) were Amhara. The presence of this wide gap might be due to the fact that Argoba ethnic group has an affiliation with Muslim religion in which early marriage practices are prevailing. The chi-square value also showed that the association of early marriage and ethnicity were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.392$, $P = 0.002$ for rural and $\chi^2 = 15.659$, $P = 0.004$ for urban).

This finding is consistent with the study conducted in Shashemene, Ethiopia on the trends in early marriage by Mutgan (2014) which found that respondents with Gurage ethnicity have the lowest and Oromos have the highest risk to marry before the age of 18. It is also in agreement with the study by Sah RB *et al.*, (2014) in Nepal, which revealed that ethnicity was strongly associated with early marriage. It is also consistent with the study conducted in Nigeria by Ezra (2013) which found out that Hausa women are at relatively higher risks of marrying than those in other ethnic groups.

Table 5: Association of Early Marriage with Ethnicity

Place of residents	Ethnicity	Age at marriage				χ^2	<i>P-Value</i>
		Below 18		18 and above			
		No.	%	No.	%		
Rural	Oromo	76	55.5	61	44.5	15.392	0.002*
	Somali	25	83.3	5	16.7		
	Amhara	1	25.0	3	75.0		
	Argoba	8	100	0	0		
Urban	Oromo	40	31	89	69	15.659	0.004*
	Somali	23	60.5	15	39.5		
	Amhara	7	26.9	19	73.1		

Argoba	5	71.4	2	28.6
Others	2	33.3	4	66.7

Source: Computed from field survey, 2017;*is significant at less than 5% level of confidence

Determinants of early marriage with selected socio cultural variables

Logistic regression model was used to analyze the effects of variables that are discussed above on early marriage. However, variables such as family size and ethnicity among rural respondents were not significant. Similarly, respondents' education and religion were not significant among urban respondents. But, rural respondents whose current age were below 20 years were 43.9 times more likely married earlier compared to those whose current age were 20 and above (OR=43.952, 95% C.I. (13.443-143.707). The respondents who cannot read and write were 6.4 times more likely married earlier compared to those who can read and write in the rural areas (OR=6.473, 95% C.I. (2.253-18.600), as shown in Table 6. This result was comparatively in agreement with a study conducted in rural parts of Ethiopia by Alemayehu (2014) and a study conducted by Sarker *et al.* (2012) in Bangladesh which revealed that women with secondary and higher education are more likely to marry at 18 years and above than their counterparts, i.e. those who cannot read and write.

On the other hand, the urban respondents whose family had 1-4 children were 3.4 times more likely married earlier than the respondents whose family had 5 and above children (OR=3.454, 95% C.I. (1.391- 8.578) as shown in Table 6. The Urban respondents whose current age were below 20 years were 14.1 times more likely married earlier as compared to their counterparts (20 and above) (OR=14.194, 95% C.I. (4.776-42.181). The respondents whose parents used to control them were 83% less likely married earlier than those who were not controlled by their parents (OR=0.173, 95% C.I. (0.072-.416) among urban dwellers as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Correlates of Early Marriage with Selected Socio Cultural Variables

Place of residence	Variables	Responses	B	Wald	Df	Sig.	OR
Rural	Current age	Below 20 years	3.783	39.174	1	.000	43.952
		20 and above*					
	Respondents Education	Cannot read and write	1.868	12.026	1	.001	6.473
	Constant	Literate*					
			-.509	.771	1	.380	.601
Urban	Family size	1-4 children	1.239	7.131	1	.008	3.454
		5 and above children*					
	Current age	Below 20 years	2.653	22.789	1	.000	14.194
		20 and above*					
	Parental control	Yes	-	15.420	1	.000	.173
		No*	1.753				
	Cultural influences	Yes	1.033	4.470	1	.034	2.808
		No*					
	Ethnicity	Oromo	-.861	4.225	1	.040	.423
		Non-Oromos*					

Constant	-	6.646	1	.010	.186
	1.680				

Source: Computed from field survey, 2017

*Ref: Reference category OR= Odd Ratio C.I. = Confidence interval

In urban setting, the association of early marriage with cultural influences was also computed with binary logistic regression. As a result, the respondents who subscribe to the cultural influences in their areas were 2.8 times more likely to get married earlier compared to those who did not believe as such among urban respondents (OR=2.808, 95% C.I (1.073-7.314) as shown in Table 6. Similarly, the respondents who were ethnically Oromo were 58% less likely married earlier compared to their non-Oromo counterparts (OR=0.423, 95% C.I (0.186-0.961). This finding is not in agreement with the study conducted by Mutgan (2014) in Shashemene, Ethiopia. He found that those with Oromo ethnic identity are estimated to have the highest risk to marry before the age 18. The difference probably is marked with religion affiliation at the two study areas, i.e. more Muslim versus more Christian respondents at Babile and its environs and Shashemene, respectively.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it is possible to conclude that early marriage is a major social problem in Babile town and is more pronounced in its environs. The wide gap in the proportion of early marriage practice found between these two geographic areas indicate unequal emphasis given by concerned bodies in tackling the problem. In both settings of these areas, educating women was very important in increasing the age at marriage. The cultural influences, particularly, the traditional dancing or feast in the rural areas known as “*Shegoye*” which is often practiced at nights and performed during marriage ceremony played a major role in driving women to marry early in rural area. Similarly, low parental control, which might pave the way for young women to participate on chat chewing ceremony (*bercha*) performed at each house in the urban area contributed for their early indulgence into sex and early marriage. The religious and ethnic affiliations, particularly among Muslim and Argoba women, were also the prominent factors responsible for the occurrence of early marriage in both localities of study area. Thus, much remains to be accomplished to solve this alarming problem of the society.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support they received from the Ministry of Education through the Haramaya University to accomplish this study. Furthermore, authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions to improve the quality of the paper.

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