

Sociodemographic Characteristics as an Indicator of Mobbing in Companies

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Abstract

The process of globalization and the increasingly interconnected network of business relationships and financial flows and direct investment influence the dynamics of development and the room for maneuver of companies in the global market. In the world of work, change happens at incredible speed, employee action, how employers and employees alike are exposed to constant changes and stress. New managerial tactics and restructuring of companies - especially following the takeovers, mergers and acquisitions (status changes) - generally lead to reduction of workplaces and lay-offs. This creates a fertile ground for potential conflicts, stress and harassment at work.

Research about harassment at work or mobbing after three decades has entered a new phase in which, after collecting a large number of data about incidence of abuse and its consequences around the world, there was a need to build comprehensive models for the understanding of the dynamics of mobbing and not only through their records, but also through establishing the reason and the way of their existence. The research results show that the labor organizations in the transition countries are quite favorable for the occurrence of mobbing.

This research attempts to answer the question what behaviors are symptomatic of mobbing and to which socio-demographic characteristics of people most often tie. In this study, 358 respondents were included questioned by from several organizations working in the region of Macedonia. Respondents were questioned by authors who prepared a MQ questionnaire (Mobbing Questionnaire). The results show that the most common victims of mobbing are employees with length of service from 10 to 20 years old and poorly qualified staff. The most common mobbing behaviors are opposing the law and behaviors related to the exact work.

Keywords: mobbing, socio-demographic variables, work organizations

Introduction

“In modern world, workplace is the only battlefield remained where people can kill each other without any risk of being brought to court.”

Hans Layman¹

When it comes to violence in the workplace, in our country, as well as in other countries, the attention is traditionally focused on physical violence at workplace and what is implied by incident situations of physical conflict. However, the data in the last couple of years show that psychological violence at workplace (mobbing) becomes more and more prominent phenomenon. Problems in relation to mobbing at work creatively motivate a special interest in the last couple of years, which brings to many scientific and popular publications. Social preoccupation has also grown and different political and work institutions, both at national and

¹Leymann, H. (1996). The content and development of mobbing at work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5 (2), 165-184.

international level, have spoken through different documents, about their concern regarding this issue.

The problem of this research is the lack of attention that the organizations pay to the significance of mobbing phenomenon (as one of the most dominant problems in modern enterprises), as well as ignorance regarding the connection of this concept and significant aspects of organized life.

This effort should practically demonstrate the complexity and significance of mobbing and its impact on business results in modern companies. Mobbing as a generic term is presented through a series of behaviors described as repeated unreasonable way of behavior aimed towards the employee or a group of employees from the part of a colleague, supervisor subordinates, that it impairs their dignity, physical integrity, mental health and compromises professional future of the victim.

Empirical results show that awareness level regarding the mobbing issue is very often inadequately perceived in relation to the importance and significance of this issue in enterprises and in the country as well. Main reasons for this lack of the treatment of harassment issues in our country are reflected through the lack of awareness, low priority of this issue, inadequate tools and methodology for evaluation and management of this issue, and there is also a lack or a limitation of a special regulation regarding this subject.

Theoretical framework and literature review

Mobbing has become a global problem because it happens in almost every work organization with a tendency for growth, but it is still considered that tolerance to psychical abuse of workers is culturally determined. In addition, accelerated technical and technological developments of innovations contribute to the increase of risk from stress and violence in the workplace (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006).

Harassment at work or mobbing is a concept that interested scientific and wider public when it was determined that it causes negative consequences both for work organization and the pleasure and efficiency of the employed workers. Increased interest in this subject has encouraged the

Scientists to examine different forms of mobbing at work (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003), the prevalence of the phenomenon (Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2011), consequences for the victims of mobbing and work organizations (Giardiet al., 2007), and to develop preventive measures and interventions related to harassment in the workplace (Schat and Kelloway, 2003).

Mobbing is a psychological terror in business life and it refers to a hostile and no ethical communication and harassments that are aimed in a systematical manner from one or more persons, mostly towards one person, who is because of mobbing in a position where he is helpless and unable to defend himself (Leyman, 1996). This happens with high frequency (at least once a week) and in a longer period of time (at least six months), which leads to a significant mental, psychosomatic and social suffering of the victims. Mobbing is a real aggression, which is achieved by ignoring, humiliating, calumniating, mocking, unjust accusations and it includes all types of harassment and discrimination at work (Crawshaw, 2009).

In this paper, we will analyze differences in experiencing mobbing in the context of some socio-demographic variables that can roughly be divided to those that concern characteristics of an employee, characteristics of the job and characteristics of work organization. In this manner, the relationship between different experiencing of mobbing and the following socio-demographic

variables will be analyzed: gender, age (as a quantitative variable), education (categorical variable: elementary, secondary, college and university education), years of service, hierarchical status (organization levels: management, experts, nonqualified) and the category of employees (officials, manufacturing workers).

Although the analysis of differences among genders according to the exposure to abuse at work have given unambiguous results, this variable is useful to be included in the analysis because the inconsistency of results regarding this characteristic can precisely be the consequence of different manner of experiencing the abuse, and therefore different attitude towards the abuse. Comparison of men and women by the manner of experiencing the mobbing can contribute to the understanding of whether among the listed victims of mobbing at work the majority are women because they are “more sensitive” to negative actions and due to specific manner of socialization they are more willing to accept the role of a victim (Rozenfeld, 2005). Similarly, to the “sensitivity” of women, for different actions of abuse at work, *education level* can also be a factor for different non-ethical actions in work organization, because it can be assumed that employees who have higher level of education and somewhat more skills and resources for reaching the information regarding this issue (for example, information on the internet), and thus they are able to spot it earlier.

The age, as well as gender, does not represent a clear and consistent factor of risk for exposure to mobbing at work. In the study of Hoel & Cooper (2000) it was shown that the age is not significantly connected with exposure to abuse at work, although it was shown that younger employees and middle-aged employees have somewhat greater risk to be exposed to mobbing at work than the older ones. In the study of mobbing in a several work organizations throughout Macedonia, it was also shown that years are not particularly significant in the aspect of exposure to abuse at work (size of effect is small), but that the older respondents are somewhat more exposed to mobbing actions than the younger. However, similarly as in case of the variable gender, the age is an important factor that, first of all, can contribute to differences in experiencing some stressful circumstances (Palmer & Panchal, 2011), and therefore the manner of reacting to such circumstances.

In the research of mobbing in work environment, it was shown that *hierarchical status* is a risk factor for the person to become an attacker rather than victim of mobbing (Coyne, 2011). However, hierarchical status can be an important factor of selecting the repertoire for abusing someone (“subtly” or “more openly”), and thus the different manner of experiencing it.

Methodology

Subject and goal of the research

One of the questions that we do not have sufficient (empirical) answers to, is how socio-demographic factors are experienced in relation to mobbing of employees and understanding the constraints specific for mobbing simultaneously trying to include several different problems. By risk analysis in the aspect of wider socio-demographic factors that follow studies of mobbing in different time periods, we can come to sustainable recommendations that overcome them and that can, as such, still be applicable in development of research methodology for abuse at work (mobbing), as well as in the process of victim protection.

A general goal of this study is to determine whether there is mobbing in case of employees and in what kind of relation are socio-demographic characteristics of samples (gender, age,

education, years of service, organizational levels, and categories of workers) and maltreatment of employees at work. Additional goal of this paper points to the significance of recognizing mobbing and the increase of general awareness regarding this rapidly extending problem.

Research design

Research was realized through four steps. The first step was referred to the modification of existing and construction of new questionnaires. The second step was piloting of an integrated questionnaire and its further regulation according to the feedback obtained. The third step implied data collection and the fourth preparation of data for the analysis.

Instruments

For the construction of questionnaire, we took data from literature about mobbing, as well as data on the existing measurement instruments. Some statements were taken from already existing questionnaires Layman Inventory of Psychological Terrorization, LIPT; (Leymann, 1996) and The Negative Action Questionnaire, NAQ; (Einarsen et al., 2009), who made the study of abuse at work throughout the world comparable and the data interpretable in the context of different cultural and organizational characteristics. The statements taken were translated and adapted to Macedonian language, included into the questionnaire that was used in this study. In addition to those statements, there were new statements constructed having in mind the data from literature about mobbing. Based on those criteria, we selected 46 statements that described different undesirable situations and forms of behavior at the workplace, which have been evaluated on a Likert scale with values from 1 to 5. Agreement with statements goes from 1 (we strongly disagree) to 5 (we strongly agree). This set of statements was called MQ – (Mobbing Questionnaire). The questionnaire was applied individually. Prior to filling it in, the employees were guaranteed the anonymity of answers.

Research results

The study was carried out in the field of the Republic of Macedonia, in several cities, and the research included employees from eight work organizations. At the beginning, it was approached to the identification of individuals who more often than the others experience negative forms of behavior symptomatic for mobbing, on a sample of 358 employees who have entirely filled in the questionnaire in work organizations. In this paper, we will analyze differences in experiencing negative actions in context of some socio-demographic variables that can roughly be divided into those that concern the characteristic of employee, characteristic of job and characteristic of work organization.

In this manner, we will analyze the relation between different experiencing of mobbing and the following variables: gender, age (as a quantitative variable), education (categorical variable: elementary, secondary, college and university education), years of service, hierarchical status (organizational levels: management, experts, non-qualified) and the category of employees (offers, manufacturing workers).

Table 1. Frequency of victims of mobbing and other employees in relation to some socio-demographic variables
Source: calculations are done by the author

Categories	Groups	Fo	Ft	X ²	df	P
Gender	Male	11	16,09	2,91	1	,088244
	Female	25	19,91			
Education	Non-qual.	4	1,51	5,23	2	,072987
	Secondary	20	18,50			
	Univ./MA/PhD	12	15,09			
Age	< 30	6	6,13	0,60	2	,740599
	30-40	11	13,04			
	40-50	19	16,83			
Years of service	< 10	8	8,45	12,44	2	,01987
	10 -20	19	9,95			
	20 >	9	17,60			
Organizational levels	management	5	6,03	6,69	2	,035322
	experts	26	28,26			
	non-qualified	5	1,71			
Category of employees	Officers	26	21,82	2,03	1	,154026
	production	10	14,18			

In order to determine socio-demographic characteristics of employees who more frequently experience behaviors specific for mobbing, we calculated the frequencies of mobbing victims for each category. Since the number of employees in the categories wasn't equal, prior to Chi-square test, theoretical frequencies for particular categories were calculated by the formula: Theoretical frequency (Ft) = number of respondents in a group / total number of respondent's number of victim's x number of mobbing victims. Based on the familiarity with the observed and theoretical frequencies of mobbing victims in each category, by using the Chi-square test we calculated differences in mobbing frequencies between groups in particular categories.

Table 2. Differences in mobbing frequency between the employees categorized in the aspect of some socio-demographic variables

Categories	Groups	N			Ft
Gender	Male	160	149	11	6,87
	Female	198	173	25	12,6
Education	Non-qualify.	15	11	4	26,7
	Second ed.	184	164	20	10,9
	Univ./MA/PhD	159	147	12	7,55
Age	< 30	47	41	6	12,77
	30-40	100	89	11	11
	40- 50	129	110	19	14,73
	50 >	82	82	0	0
Years of service	< 10	84	76	8	9,52
	10-20	99	80	19	19,19
	20 >	175	166	9	5,14
Organizational levels	Management	60	55	5	8,3
	experts	281	255	26	9,2
	non-qualified	17	12	5	29,41
Category of employees	Officials	217	191	26	11,98
	Production	141	131	10	7,09

Source: calculations are done by the authors

Of the total number of men and women who took part in examination, in the sample of mobbing victims we identified 6,87% men and 12,6% women. Chi-square test was used and it was determined that a difference in frequency of mobbing victims between men and women is not statistically significant; ($X^2 = 2,91$; $p > 0,05$). By Chi-square test we didn't determine a statistically significant difference in the frequency of mobbing victims in case of three groups of employees, according to their qualification significant ($X^2 = 5,23$; $p > 0,05$). Here we should point out that in the total sample of 358 employees, there was only 15 of them with lower education, and thus due to such a small number of respondents we should dissociate ourselves from making conclusions based on those dates (26,7 %).

The table 2 presents the classification according to the age. Interestingly, there isn't a single employee older than 50 identified as a victim of mobbing. Chi-square test didn't determine a statistically significant difference in the frequency of mobbing victims among the groups of employees according to the age ($X^2 = 0,6$; $p > 0,05$).

Out of 60 employees who work at managerial positions, according to the results achieved in MQ-questionnaire, 8,3% of them can be considered victims of mobbing. Among the employees with expert workplaces, 9,2% of them a victims of mobbing while the highest percent of victims was determined in the group of employees in non-qualified positions (29,41%). However although with a Chi-square test we obtained a significant difference between these three groups of employees ($X^2 = 6,69$; $p > 0,05$), it is necessary to mention that it would be methodologically questionable to make conclusions based on date that refer to a group of employees working on non-qualified jobs since the total sample included only 17 of them, respectively somewhat less than 5 %. Of the total number of employees who work in offices, 11,98% are mobbing victims, while among employees in production (plans and workshop) there is 7,09%. Differences in frequencies between these two groups aren't statistically significant ($X^2 = 2,03$; $p > 0,05$).

Table 3. Differences between relations of associates and superiors towards mobbing victims
(Wilcoxon test of equivalent pairs)

Categories	Groups	Superiors	Associates	N	T	z	p
Gender	Male	-2	+4	11	0	2,93	,003346
	Female	-2,5	+3	25	0	3,62	,000293
Education	Non-qualify.	-4	+3	4	0	2,53	,01179
	Sec.ed.	+1	+3	20	0	3,41	,000655
	Univ./MA/PhD	-3	+4	12	0	2,67	,00769
Age	< 30	+3	+3	6	0	1,82	,06793
	30- 40	+1	+3	11	0	2,37	,01796
	40-50	-3	+4	19	0	3,62	,000293
Years of service	< 10	+2,5	+3	8	0	2,2	,0277
	10 - 20	-4	+3	19	0	3,29	,00098
	20 >	-2	+4	9	0	2,52	,011719
Organizational level	Management	+3	+4	5	0	1,6	,1088
	expert	-3	+3	26	0	3,82	,000132
	non-qualified	-4	+3	5	0	2,02	,0431
Category of employees	Officers	-2	+3	26	0	4,01	,000060
	Production	-4	+3	10	0	2,52	,0117

Source: calculations are done by author

A special subject of analysis included the category of workplaces that is mutually distinguished by organizational levels (management, experts, non-qualified), where the evaluations of mobbing victims from managerial, expert and non-qualified positions regarding the relations of superiors and associates towards them were compared. Wilcox on test of equivalent couples points out that difference in evaluations of relations that mobbing victims employed in managerial positions give for superiors and associates is not statistically significant, i.e. both superiors and associates treat those persons equally correctly. Unlike them, based on evaluations given by mobbing victims employed on expert and non-qualified positions, we can say that both groups say that associates treat them significantly more correctly than the superiors.

The last of the problems was to determine which forms of behavior specific for mobbing are related to socio-demographic characteristics of mobbing victims. In order to determine this, 42 statements from MQ – questionnaire were ranked for each group of respondents in an individual category. Ranks of statements were determined in a manner that a statement with the highest average frequency in case of an individual group had the rank 1 and the one with the lowest rank 42. Therefore, statements with the higher ranks are behaviors that employees experience most frequently, while behaviors with the lowest ranks are the situations which mobbing victims experienced the least in the last six months.

The results have shown that mobbing victims most frequently experience the following behaviors: “They deny my rights”, “I am assigned the task that somebody else should do”, “They take credit for the job that belongs to me”, “I am overloaded with work”, “They comment on my private life”. Mobbing victims have experienced those behaviors from several times a week to almost every day. Behaviors that more rarely happen to them, and that are related to mobbing, are mostly the ones with sexual connotation.

Table 4. Rank of statements having in mind the average frequency of behaviors described in MQ – questionnaire for mobbing victims (N = 36)

Rank	Statements	Average frequency
1	6. They deny my rights	4,58
2	13. I am assigned the tasks that others should do	4,28
3	25. They take credit related for the job that belongs to me	4,08
4	45. I am over loaded at work	4,02
5	4. They comment on my private life	4,00
6	5. They give me meaningless tasks	3,97
7	2. They interrupt me as I speak	3,86
8	14. They give me too short deadlines for the execution of tasks	3,78
9	1. They keep away from me the information that are important for my job	3,75
10	3. They give me to do humiliating jobs that I am not obliged to do	3,69
11	15. They ignore my opinion and attitudes	3,69
12	23. I get the tasks that are below the level of my abilities	3,53
13	18. They gossip about me behind my back	3,52
14	46. They criticize my errors and omissions more than others	3,50
15	7. They over react to my mistakes	3,49
16	44. They do not help me in my job when I need help the most	3,34

17	35.I get the tasks that I am not qualified for	3,19
18	12.I am considered useless at work	3,06
19	10.They give me jobs harmful to health	3,03
20	22.They have a negative relationship towards my work	2,95
21	17.I am innocently accused	2,92
22	26.They yell at me	2,83
23	24.They spread rumors about me	2,81
24	11.They give me the tasks that isolate me from my colleagues	2,69
25	29.They tell me I am not able to do my job	2,56
26	37.They act as if I do not exist	2,56
27	39.They show me that I should leave the job	2,50
28	19.They avoid me during the pause	2,40
29	28.They mock my flaws	2,39
30	16. They mock my clothes	2,36
31	8. They mock my origin	2,31
32	38.They make problems in my private life	2,30
33	9.They throw comments with sexual connotation at me	2,26
34	20.They give me offensive nicknames	2,25
35	33.They imitate me and mock my gestures	2,00
36	36.They don't tolerate my political or religious beliefs	1,92
37	40.They make fun of my appearance	1,75
38	43.The cheat so they could make fun of me	1,75
39	21.They blackmail me with sexual services for the job	1,52
40	27.They touch my body	1,50
41	42.Their behavior towards me suggest sexual relations	1,50
42	41.Nobody talks to me	1,47

Source: calculations are done by the author

In order to examine the level of agreement among mobbing victims in their evaluations of frequency of experiencing different behaviors, we used the coefficient of concordance (W) which was used to test the compliance level between the ranks of statements from MQ-questionnaire for particular categories of employees. Calculated coefficients of concordance are statistically significant for each category which means that mobbing victims attribute equal ranks to the same statements, i.e. same situations equally often happen to the victims of mobbing in all groups of individual categories (Table 5).

Table 5. Agreement level of mobbing victims according to frequency of behaviors described in MQ – questionnaire (Coefficient of concordance, W)

Categories	N	W	P
Gender	M = 11 F = 25	,909	< 0,5
Education	Non-qual. = 4 Sec.ed = 20 Univ./MA/PhD = 12	,815	< 0,5
Age	< 30 y. = 6 30 - 40 y. = 11 40 -50 y. = 19	,736	< 0,5
Years of service	< 10 y. = 8 10 -20 y. = 19 20 y. > = 9	,847	< 0,5
Organization levels	management = 5 expert = 26 non-qualified = 5	,787	< 0,5
Category of workers	Officers = 26 Production = 10	,941	< 0,5

Source: calculations are done by author

Discussion

The aim of this research was to determine the behaviors symptomatic for mobbing, as well as socio-demographic characteristics of persons who experience such behaviors in work organizations in this region. The first problem was to determine socio demographic characteristics of persons that more frequently experience behaviors symptomatic for mobbing than those who do not experience such behaviors or rarely experience them.

When it comes to the category of the years of service, 9,52% of employees with the years of service between 10 and 20, as well as 5,14% of employees with the years of service longer than 20 years were identified as the victims of mobbing. Differences between those groups in mobbing frequency are statistically significant, and based on percentage of victims in a particular group we can say that persons who work from 10 to 20 years are significantly more present among mobbing victims than the persons from the other two groups. A group of victims with years of service longer than 20 years is the least exposed to mobbing. The reason for this result is probably in the fact that years of service from 10 to 20 years are kind of a milestone in people life. Majority of people are in this period at the peak of their career and probably many other employees become aware of the fact that previously unfulfilled wishes regarding the expectations related to the job will remain unfulfilled. Although this doesn't have to be the truth for everyone, most people in this period of working life think like this. This can affect their mood and vulnerability at work, which the persons more prone to expressing the behaviors that can cause mobbing, can use for the attack.

In the category of organizational levels of a workplace, 8,3% managers, 9,2% of respondents employed in expert positions and only 29,41% of employees on non-qualified jobs were identified as victims of mobbing. Difference in mobbing frequency for this group is statistically more significant than in case of respondents employed in expert and managerial positions. The latter are least present among mobbing victims. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that persons employed in non-qualified positions are the lowest in work hierarchy (it is referred to the porter, hygienist, etc.). Other people evaluate such jobs as the least important for working organization, and usually these are the persons of somewhat more modest education, more modest income, and they are thus more frequently susceptible to mobbing probably because proper strategies for dealing with such situations cannot be found (Niedl, 1996). The majority issues requirements and tasks to them, and very often there appears a conflict of the role, as well as ambiguity of the role, which is favorable for the appearance of mobbing.

Unlike them, managers are the persons who enjoy greater reputation than the employees in non-qualified and expert jobs, they have higher income, higher status and greater power in an organization and they are often untouchable, and the others do not dare to direct the activities related to mobbing towards such persons.

Employees have answered whether the persons they suffer mobbing from are mainly men or women. From 11 men mobbing victims, nine said that they are equally exposed to mobbing from the part of men and women. On the other hand, 14 of the total 25 women mobbing victims say that both genders equally "oppress" them, three women said that it is mainly about men, while the other eight women mentioned other women as executors of mobbing. Such a result is probably conditioned by the fact that in work organizations where the study was carried out, women still mainly work with women only and men with men. In addition, having in mind the social and cultural image of our society, it is expected that men will not admit that they are maltreated by women in their workplace, even when it is truly so, having in mind that it isn't in accordance with traditional description of man's role. Ten, as the major part of mobbing is mainly of a downward character, we must mention that major part of management is in the hands of men, and thus it seems logical to expect that men will not often mention women as executors who are, on the other hand, more frequently exposed to mobbing precisely from the part of men. Similar result, for the employees to oppress the persons of the same gender, was obtained by Leymann and Gustafsson, (1996) in the study carried out in Swedish steel factory.

There is a significant compliance between mobbing victims from a certain category in the ranks assigned for each statement, which means that victims within each category assign equal ranks to the same statements, i.e. the same behaviors are often equally experienced by all mobbing victims, regardless of the gender, age, education and other categories. In this manner, men and women, employees with secondary and college and university qualifications, employees aged from 40-50, with the years of service longer than 20 years, persons employed in expert positions, employed in manufacturing, as well as employees in offices most frequently experience the injustice related to the denial of their rights. Mobbing victims with lower qualifications are most frequently exposed to avoiding during the pause.

Since those persons are usually at lower positions in hierarchical level in an organization they work in, and often they, in a minority, refer to the other groups in education category, their kind of isolation from the others is no surprise. Victims younger than 30 and with the years of service shorter than 10 years are most frequently exposed to behaviors where their private life is commented on. It seems that new workers are frequently exposed to comments related to their

private life because they attract attention as being new. Since the night into abilities and skills of worker's personality takes a longer time to be obtained, new workers are exposed to the comments related to social component because it is possible to get an insight into it prior to the others. Victims in the age from 30 and 40 most frequently experience that the others take credit for their work. This result is probably a consequence of the fact that persons in this age are the most engaged in helping the older and younger people than themselves within an organization than it is the case with other age groups.

Managers most frequently experience situations where they are assigned the tasks that are below their ability level. Very often, it happens that due to savings of labor, managers perform the tasks that are below their ability level. This has become common because any kind of complaint to the superior can lead to position degradation, even demission. Women employed in non-qualified jobs most frequently experience the situation where they are given health-threatening.

Conclusion

In spite the increasing recognition of mobbing in our society, we still cannot precisely define and determine the consequences that it leaves on an individual and work environment. Based on analyses carried out, it was shown that 42 statements from MQ- questionnaire can discriminate quite well the victims of mobbing from those who aren't. Employees with from 10 to 20 years of service are significantly more present among victims in relation to persons employed with years of service that are shorter than 10 or longer than 20 years. Persons employed in qualified jobs are most present among mobbing victims in relation to persons employed in professional or managerial workplaces. Mobbing victims most frequently experience behaviors related to the denial of their rights, and behavior in case of mobbing victims of different socio-demographic characteristics, we can contribute to further and deeper understanding of mobbing, and therefore prevent mobbing in work environments and develop a system of control (evaluation) and support in the work environment.

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