

Reasons for Dropouts of School Girls: A Study on Saidpur of Nilphamary District

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to identify the reasons behind girl's dropout from school in rural areas of Bangladesh and understand the problem to find out possible solutions. A questionnaire survey, case study and focus group discussion were selected as study instrumentations which were administered at Golna Union of Saidpur Upazila of Nilphamari district. The study identified some socio-cultural and economic reasons behind the girl's dropout problem. Economic vulnerability of the families was the primary reason identified behind the problem. Some other problems identified are like dowry, child marriage, the unemployment problem, tendencies to get a job at Uttara Export Processing Zone (UEZP) and, insufficient cash support for continuing study. Creating job opportunities through industrialization and transferring extra agricultural labour were identified as the best possible solutions. Also, immediate steps against the dowry system and child marriage, guide book and tuition study system, engaging Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in development activities have been recommended to mitigate the problem. Solving girl's dropout problem warrants a holistic approach, engaging all the possible stakeholders to build a quality education system and a socio-economically transformed society for the future generation.

Keywords: Girl's dropout, economic vulnerability, industrialization, quality education.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh faces the challenges to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) goal number four (Quality Education) along with other problems of the country. It has a large population of almost 160 million, amongst which around 21 million children of the age of 6-10 are eligible for primary school, and another 10 million students are eligible to study at a higher level. As women comprise half of the population of the country, female education has become a prime need to uphold the development, progress as well as flourishes of the nation. Though women are an integral part of the economy, they are being deprived of education because of many reasons. Poverty is a significant reason behind the dropout of girls. Just ten years ago, little girls were being compelled to work as domestic help to survive. In Saidpur Upazila, a considerable number of girls work in different industries of the Uttara Export Processing Zone (UEPZ) and other industries out of UEPZ. In some industries, the girls also

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have a meagre income job, sacrificing their study and getting engaged in a circle of poverty. However, female education contributes to poverty alleviation, improved nutrition and reduced fertility. Education also improves women's health outcomes and life expectancy, their ability to influence family decisions and their likelihood of engaging in formal paid employment. Apart from the intrinsic value of education, better-educated women are more productive and have higher incomes; they marry later and have fewer, healthier and better-educated children. So, without having a sustainable accommodation for girls in education, Bangladesh cannot make "Vision 2041" possible. Again for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, the goal number four and five quality education and gender equality, Bangladesh has to ensure the proper facilities for girl's education. This study was conducted on the rural dropout girls of Saidpur Upazila to reveal the school dropout scenario of girls. The main objectives of the study are:

- i. To identify the reasons behind girl's dropout from school;
- ii. To explain the present condition of dropped out girls;
- iii. To find out the possible solutions to the problem;

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dropout of girls from school is a common phenomenon in society. The enrollment of girls is almost equal to boys, but girls are less to fulfill education and drop out of school (Chimombo 1999; Homes 2003). As girls are more likely to drop out comparatively than boys, there must be unique factors contributing to girl's dropout. Holcamp (2009) also supports this statement, as he found some socio-cultural factors contributing to the dropout of girls from school. This section of the article will explore the factors and supporting studies to strengthen the factors.

Factors Influencing Girl's School Dropout

Economic Vulnerability

Ahmed and Ahmmed (2015) studied on the causes behind deserted women and found that most of the deserted women had grown up in landless and wage earning families. Economic vulnerability of the families leads the girls towards dropout from school and limits their study up to primary level. These matters also contribute towards early marriage, which may result in unhappy conjugal life. Also, girls are used as child labour to support family income rather than going to school. This is a reason for remaining absent from classes or being irregular in the study. Researchers have tried to understand the role of economic condition behind limited schooling of girls and found a positive relationship. Blundell et al. (2005) and Oxaal (1997) reported that the level of education and the amount of daily wage of an individual has a positive correlation. Many studies indicated that children from low socio-economic mobility background tend to have no or less schooling while a child from better-off household is more likely to enrol and continue his studies (Brown & Park 2002; Hunt 2008). Brown & Park (2002) reported that enrollment of children from low-income families is less than that of well to do families. Even if they do enrol, they have a high chance of dropout from schooling. According to Maslow (1943), environmental catalysts like famine, flood and draughts have significant influences behind school enrollment and dropout and identified that as another socio-economic factor. Maslow stated that people from those regions strive hard to satisfy the primary needs and education seems to be luxury for them.

Parents Biases

Gender biases are a fact which is found in developing countries. Parents most likely try to support the boy's education than the girl's (Glick & Sahn 2000; Kingdon 2005). Grant and Grant & Hallman (2006) found that drop out of girl's from school has a positive association with the financial strength of the family.

Lack of Awareness of Parents

Ahmed and Ahmmed (2015) reported that, besides economic vulnerability, parents' lack of awareness about the importance of education also played a significant role in girl's low level of education. Lack of parent's education and their ability to understand school related works also contribute as the reasons behind being less interested in a child's schooling (Ahmed et al. 2005). In most of the cases, parent's awareness on the importance of schooling plays a vital role in enrollment and retention in school. In some cases, parents emphasize instant earning rather than investing for the future. Akresh (2008) reported that parent's concept and expectations about the return from the investments behind their child's education play a vital role in enrollment and dropout from school.

Early Marriage

Mansory (2007) identified early marriage as a principal cause of girl's dropout from school in Afghanistan. Also, parents are reluctant to girl's education as because they consider that girls are to leave their house after marriage. Thus, educating girls is not bringing any benefit to the family (Holcamp 2009).

Dowry

Ahmed & Ahmmed (2015), in their study, revealed that dowry is a major influencing factor in the process of child marriage as dowry is lower for young wives.

Parents' Education

Shihab (2018) reported that not only economic background, but also parent's education, location and many other factors are liable behind dropout of girls from school.

Age and Class of Dropout

Shihab (2018) found that dropouts transpire in a specific pattern in different grades of the school hierarchy. According to Shihab (2018), the environment of the school, gender security, competency of the teachers and motivation for education are also determinants of school enrollment and retention.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF GIRL'S SCHOOL DROPOUT IN BANGLADESH

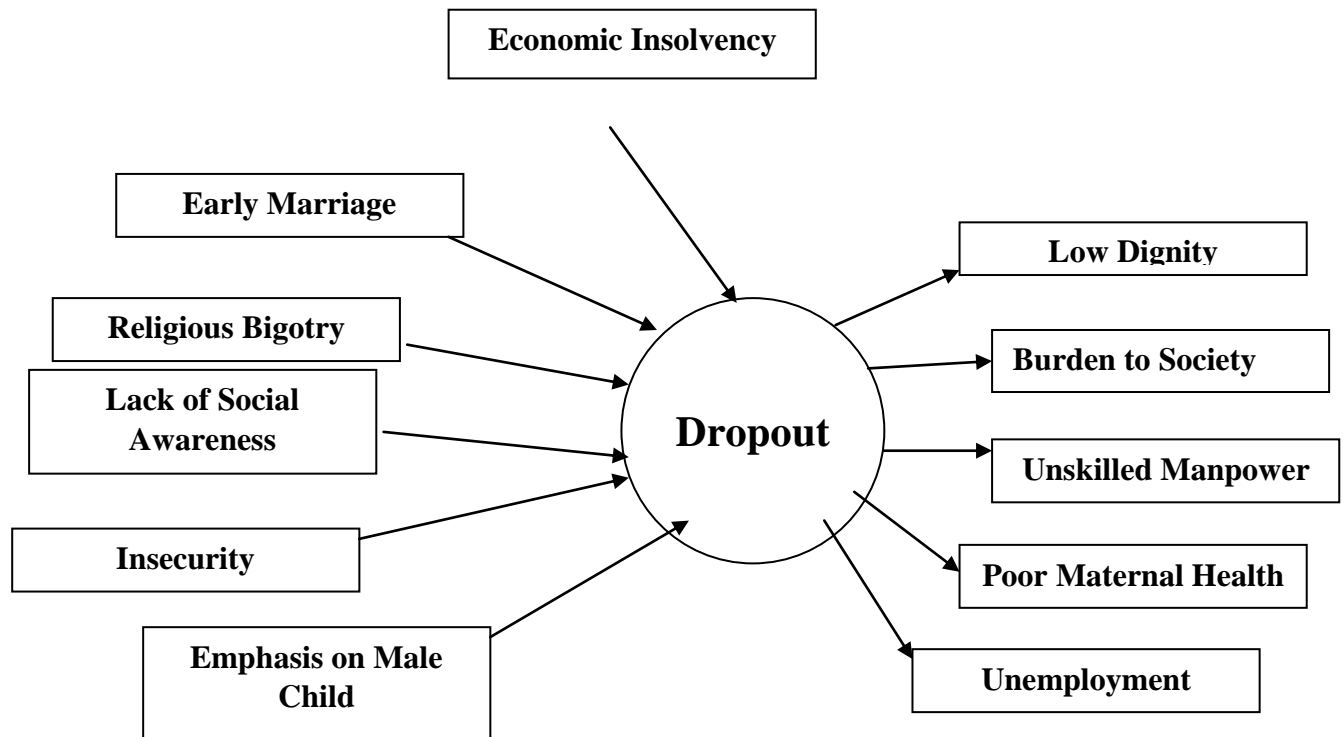


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Girl's School Dropout in Bangladesh

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to complete this research work. Three data collection tools, i.e. i) Questionnaire Survey ii) Focus Group Discussion and iii) Case Study were used in the collection of primary data. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 49 dropped out girls of different villages of Khata Madhupur and Kashiram Belpukur Union of Saidpur Upazila. A Focus Group Discussion was conducted at Khata Madhupur Union where public representatives, parents, teachers and school dropout girls were present. Two case study were conducted focusing on two significant circumstances of the same area.

Data Analysis

The data entry and data analysis was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science), and graphs were prepared using Microsoft Excel software. Frequency distribution, histogram, bar diagram, pie chart etc. were used for categorical variables, and some variables were grouped based on similarity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data acquired from the questionnaire survey, case study and focus group discussion were analyzed the results show a significant influence of some factors over girl's school dropout problem.

Last level of Education During Drop out

The study shows that majority of girls were dropped in the primary level of education. About 60% of girls dropped out in classes 1-5, while the rest of the 40% of girls dropped out at secondary level (class 6-10).

Parents' Occupation

The study reveals that 46.94% of parents were farmers, 28.57% day labourer, 12.24% unemployed, 6.12% businessman, 4.08% rickshaw puller and 2.04% were involved in other occupations. This indicates the economic vulnerability and poor socio-economic conditions of the families. Thus, this result establishes the parent's occupation as an influencing factor behind girl's dropout from school, which is supported by previous research (Brown & Park 2002; Hunt 2008).

Educational Qualification of Parents

The result shows that the dropped out girls' parents were mostly uneducated. A few parents were from the primary and secondary level background. Thus, the result signifies the parents' education level as an essential factor behind girls' dropout from school, which is also supported by the findings of Shihab (2018).

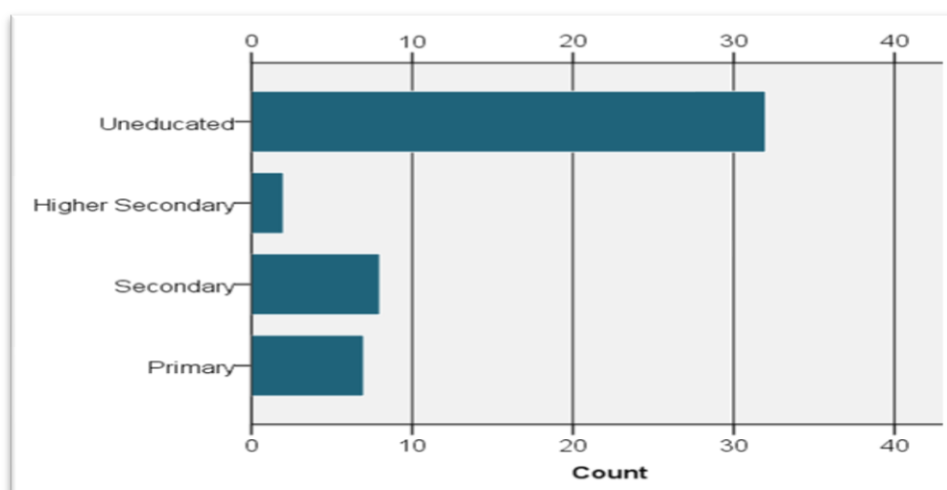


Figure 2: Educational Qualifications of Parents

Number of Earning Members of a Family

The study reveals that 89.80% of families had only one earning member, whereas only 2.04% of families had two earning members. It is dismal that 8.16% of families had no earning members. That also provides the economic vulnerability scenario of the families, which is supported by the findings of Ahmed & Ahmmed (2015).

Numbers of Dependent Members

High dependency ratio was found in the families of dropped out girls where 76.27% of families had 4-6 persons who had no income. On the other hand, 18.64% of families had 1-3 dependent members, and a few families had more than six dependent members in the family. Again this is evident that economic vulnerability of the families influences girl's school dropout, which is supported by the findings of Ahmed & Ahmmed (2015).

Number of School-going Members of a Family

The maximum number of families had 1-3 school going children whereas 25% of families had no school going children. This might indicate the burden of the families to continue the study of the children. Thus, deciding the stopping of daughters from going to school can be drawn as a reason behind dropout from this result, which is also supported by the similar findings of Akresh (2008).

Annual Income of the Family

The study revealed that annual family income of dropped out girls were low. In maximum cases, annual family income is Tk.51,000-80,000Tk. The second highest was the range of Tk. 20,000 - 50,000, which is more pathetic. This low income can be because of the farming and day labourer as a parent's occupation and remaining unemployed after the agricultural seasons. The results of this chart are supported by the findings of Brown & Park (2002), who reported that children from low-income families are more likely to drop out of school.

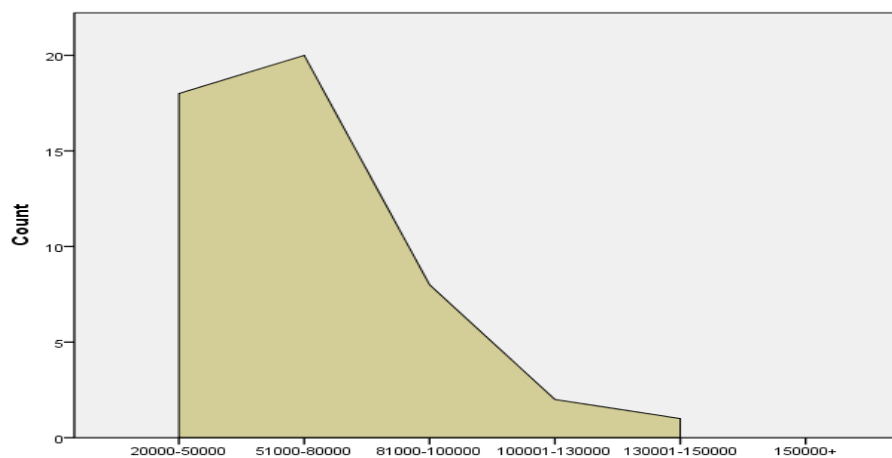


Figure 3: Annual Family Income

Age During the Dropout

The study shows that 85.71% of girls were dropped out when they were at the age of 11-15 years old. Rests of the girls were dropped out at 6-10 years of age. So, none of them has completed the Secondary School Certificate examination, which is an alarming matter to consider.

Reasons Behind Dropout

About 98% of girls said, the economic problem is the root cause behind their dropping out of school as families could not afford the expenses of their study. Through, the study reveals that economic problem is the main reason for the dropout of girl's which aligns with the previous results of the study.

Distance of Nearest Primary School From Home

Maximum respondents said that primary schools are situated within 1-2 km from their home. Only 9% of girls said the nearest primary school is more than 2 km away from their home. This indicates that the infrastructural support is available and is not a cause behind the dropout of girls.

Distance of Nearest High School From Home

The study reveals that 44% respondent's secondary school is situated within 1-2 km from their home, whereas 18% of girls said that the nearest secondary school is less than 1 km away from their home. This, again, indicates the available infrastructural support.

Distance of Nearest College From Home

In the case of college, 44% respondent's college is situated within 1-2 km from their home, and another 44% girls said that the nearest college is more than 2 km away from their home. The rest 12% of students have college within 1 km from their home. However, the matter of fact is that none of them has got the chance to study at the college.

Transport for Going to Educational Institutions

From the study, it is found that 65.31% of girls used to walk to their school, 22.45% of the girls could avail rickshaw, and 12.24% could avail motor vehicle to go to school. This might also be indicative of their poor socio-economic condition. However, short distance to educational institutions can be the reason for walking to go to school.

Quality of Education Provided By Nearby Institutions

The girls are very much satisfied with the quality of education provided at their institutions. 79.59% of girls think that nearby educational institutions are providing excellent education,

while 10.20% think that education quality is not good enough. Another 10.20% did not have their opinion about educational quality.

Leaving School in Own interest

The study shows that only 24.49% of girls left school on their own interest. Rest 75.51% was somehow forced to leave education.

Intention to Go Back to School Again

The girls were asked whether they are interested to go back to school or not. 71.43% dropped girls want to go back to education again if they get a chance. On the other hand, 28.57% dropped girls do not have any wish to go back to school again.

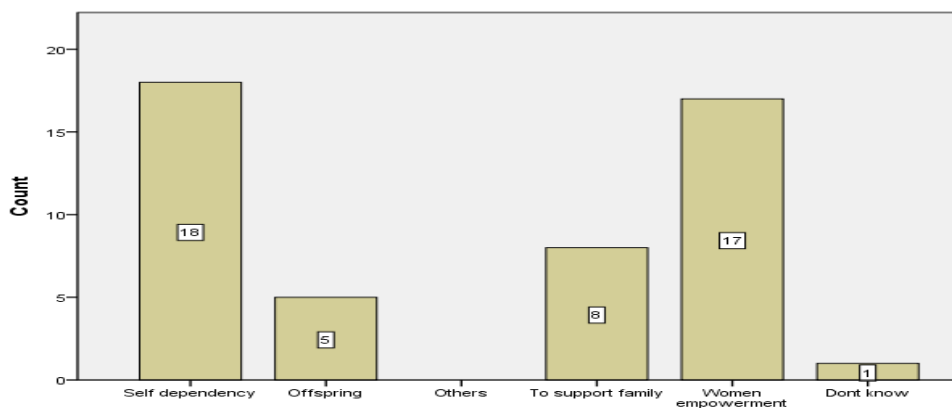


Figure 4: Why education is vital for girls

The respondents think that female education is essential. Maximum girls said that it would make them self-dependent, will help girls to get good salary and respect in society. Despite this, a good number of girls mentioned women's empowerment as a result of receiving a proper education.

OUTCOMES OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Reasons Behind Girl's School Dropout

- Financial insolvency is the leading cause of dropping out of girls from school.
- Parents tend to get the girls married early due to high demand for young girls in marriage.
- Dowry is a severe problem in the study area, and many girls use to work in the EPZ to earn money for their wedding. If the bride's age is high, the demand for dowry increases as well. This also influences the parents towards early marriage.
- Coaching centres, private tuition system and other extra costs in the schools such as money need for form fill up, exams fee etc. are like a burden to the economically vulnerable families.
- Many parents are not eager to send their daughters to school because of eve teasing.

Solutions of Girl's School Dropout Problem

- Early marriage should be stopped by implementing the existing law by the local administration with the help of public representatives.
- Dowry should be stopped, and legal action should be taken if anyone gives or receives dowry.
- Child labour should be banned in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ).
- Local peoples have to be made aware of the importance of girl's education by different programs such as drama, public meeting, poster, banner and festoon etc.
- Demerits of early marriage and dowry have to be spread out to the students by arranging open discussion in the schools and colleges.

CASE STUDY RESULTS

Case Study 1: Mr Parimol's Working Daughters

Mr Parimol is a potter who lives in Khashia Dhulia village of Khata Madhupur Union of Saidpur Upazila. He had hard times with a large family of four daughters. Because of financial constraints, his daughters had to leave school at early ages. But his days have been changed as his three daughters are working at Uttara Export Processing Zone (UEPZ). Now, they are living a perfect life with the income of three sisters. They have contracted an easy bike to carry them to the UEPZ. In the evening, Mr Parimol receives and guides his daughters for home. This is a story of girls who have managed to get a job in the UEPZ.

Case Study 2: Helpless Parveen Akhter

Parveen Akhter is a 15 years old girl who lives in Choil Gucchugram village of Khata Madhupur Union of Saidpur Upazila. She has a family of six members. The matter of sorrow is, her father died three years ago. Till then, her brother is the only earning member of the family who works as a labourer in the agricultural field. He earns about 250-300 Taka/day at the time of agricultural seasons. After the season, he becomes workless and migrates to big cities like Rangpur to pull a rickshaw. Parveen's mother works at other's house but does not

get any cash. She works for rice or other food material. Parveen was about to cry when she was telling her story. Though she was a good student and having an interest in the study, she had to leave study after Junior School Certificate examination. She could not manage any job till now and having tailoring training to develop her skills for the job. Parveen still has the interest to study again, but the family's economic condition is not allowing her to study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on finding the actual scenario of girl's school dropout situation of the villages of Saidpur Upazila. Thus, some key findings have come out, which lead towards some recommendations to mitigate the problem. The first objective was to identify the reasons behind the girl's dropout from school. To fulfil the objective, questionnaire survey,

focus group discussion and case study was done. Exploring all the results, it is concluded that there are some socio-cultural and economic reasons behind the problem. The primary reason is the economic vulnerability of the agriculture-based wage earning families. As after the agricultural seasons, the landless farmers remain without work to earn; they suffer from colossal job crisis. As a result, they cannot afford the cash expenditures required for the daughters' study. Especially, cash is required for buying guide books and coaching centre fee. Though, the girls get stipend from the Government that does not fulfil their monthly need to continue study. Also, insecurity of getting a job is another reason behind dropout. As there are limited jobs in the job market, which are also competitive to achieve, they cannot hold the hope of doing jobs. Instead, parents like to go for instant income by sending their daughter to work at Uttara EPZ. The tendency to get a job in EPZ is one of the primary reasons behind people's unwillingness towards education. As dowry system avails in a worse manner at Saidpur, they like to earn money instead of continuing their education. It was found that the entire educated or uneducated girl's parents are to pay the dowry to marry their daughter. That is why girls work in the EPZ to earn dowry money for their marriage.

The second objective was to know the present condition of dropped out girls. Both the questionnaire survey and case study provided the scenario. The dropped out girls can be divided into two groups; with a job and without a job. Most of the girl respondents are waiting to get a job in the EPZ. Mostly they are taking training from different institutions to be selected for the jobs. Because of the present socio-economic condition, girls are mostly dropping out immediately after primary education. On the other hand, those who have got a job are happy to work staying at home and supporting their family. Girls are using a bicycle to go to their job place, which indicates the light of women's social empowerment. Thus, this tendency to earn money and dropping out will pave towards another generation without quality education.

The third objective was to find out possible solutions to the problem. The results from focus group discussion and exploration of the findings of the first two objectives suggest some solutions which can be translated in action. To solve the financial problem, the alternative professions may be explored. Industrialization is the best way to do this. As Saidpur has an industry prone environment, industrialization can be promoted using this positive mindset. Also, training has to be provided to eligible persons to make them skilled workforce to join the workforce at the extension of EPZ. To facilitate girls with extra money, cottage industry can be developed, e.g. Shotoronji (colourful mat), embroidery work, and so on. Prevention of dowry and child marriage can have a tremendous effect on stopping the dropout of girls. The guide book and private coaching system should be stopped as these create differences among the different socio-economic background students. Though, Government has limited scope to provide more incentives for girl's education, the support from different NGOs working in that area can be explored. If some income generating activities can be created for girls without disrupting their education, this would bring change in the girl's school dropout scenario and will also pave the way for a socio-economically transformed better society. Thus, it can be concluded that there are quite a few socio-cultural and economic reasons behind the girl's dropout from school. With a holistic approach, including industrialization, administrative action, creation of awareness and support from NGOs, the problem can be addressed and mitigated to build a better society.

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