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Socio-economic conditions of rice-mills workers: A study on Sherpur district in Bangladesh

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Abstract

In Bangladesh, the state of rice mill workers is not so healthy; workers in their workplaces face different challenges. The aim of this report, however, is to explore the socio-economic conditions of Sherpur District, Bangladesh's workers at Rice-mills. A well-designed organized questionnaire was also created and the data from the randomly selected 110 respondents from 27 automated rice mills in Sherpur, Bangladesh, were collected by direct interview. After collecting data from the area, the scientists often perform a thorough review to evaluate the study goals. The outcome of the study indicates that employees earn a very low wage and there is an unfriendly working climate. In addition, there is no proper arrangement to resolve health, diet, pension & medical issues in the rice mills of Sherpur district. In order to improve the rural and socio-economic conditions of rice mill workers, this study also suggests prompt government action.

Keywords: Socio-economic conditions, workers, rice mills

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the top countries in the world for rice consumption. The per capita intake of rice in FY2016 stood at 196.6 kilograms and in FY2017 at 196.3 kilograms (The University of Arkansas, 2017). Rice is the most essential cereal and staple food in Bangladesh, supplying more than 70% of the total calorie intake (Zaman, Mishima, Hisano, & Gergely, 2001)^[9]. Around 75 per cent of Bangladesh's total population lives in rural areas. The rice industry provides 48 percent of rural jobs directly and indirectly, which is quite a large amount of labor. In Bangladesh, three types of rice mills are available. Husky, major and automated rice mills are these. In the Sherpur district, large types of rice mills are not available. The number of automotive rice mills in the district of Sherpur is rising day by day, resulting in the obsolescence of husky mills. Rice processing of modern automated rice-mills includes pre cleaning, de-stoning, husking, husk, aspiration, paddy separation, whitening, grading, polishing, sorting weighing and bagging.

Different stages of rice processing require a large number of workers to be employed. The level of employment provided by this industry is an important indicator of its performance. Employment in the rice-mills provides workers with economic benefits. Twenty-seven mills in Sherpur district have provided employment for 454 daily wage workers in a day. The daily wage rate however, varies by sex. Female laborers could get 69 per cent wages of the male laborers (Zaman and Hisano, 2001)^[9]. In spite of discrimination in employment, low wages, poor working conditions, long time working hours, workers in rice-milling contribute 80% to their family income. As the half of total rural employment is created by rice-milling industry and Very few studies were conducted regarding workers economic conditions of rice mills in Bangladesh, the researcher is interested to investigate the socio-economic conditions of rice-mill workers in Sherpur district.

1.1 Objective of the study

The main objective of this research study is to investigate the socio-economic circumstances of rice mill workers in Bangladesh's Sherpur district. The study's specific objectives are

1. To find out the key problems faced by workers in the Sherpur district rice mills;
2. To identifying gender inequality in salaries and jobs faced by employees in rice mills;
3. To identify the variables affecting the standard of living of employees in rice mills; and
4. To evaluate the operation of the Union of Rice Mills Workers in Bangladesh and its success in solving the problems of workers in rice mills

2. Review of Literature

Bangladesh's rice milling or processing industry is undergoing a revolution. Dhaki has not been used for paddy processing by a large number of individuals in recent years. This position was populated by machines. However, the per capita income of individuals in Bangladesh has increased substantially in recent years. People now prefer processed rice, which is less expensive, looks shiny, takes less time to cook, is free of stones & dead rice, and has a longer shelf life, due to the increase in the level of income. In this area, very few studies have been conducted. M.S Rahman and M.S Hassan (2011) argued that pressure causes rural women to break down their traditional positions in farming and rice mill activities as housewives. Their study showed that through their direct involvement in income-generating operations, the socioeconomic status of women in farm and rice worker workers should be strengthened. And Maria Khatun, et. A research on the effect of working conditions on women workers at rice mills in Bangladesh was carried out (2015). They concluded that women workers were not very sound in the occupation of rice mills and their socio-economic status was not up to the mark. These literatures shed light on the socio-economic circumstances of rice mill workers in Bangladesh. Several hundred automated and semi-automatic rice mills have been found in various rice-producing regions of Bangladesh over the previous decade. Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur, Kushtia and Jessore Noapara are some of the districts that have invested in setting up major automatic rice mills. The demand for rice milling and processing stands at about 50,000 crore Taka in one year (The Daily Star, 2015). In FY14, approximately 34.41 million tons. According to provisional data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the production of milled rice in FY15 was stated to be about 34,708 million tons, up marginally from approximately 34, 41 million tons in FY14. The researchers are interested in exploring the socio-economic conditions of rice mill workers in the Sherpur district of Bangladesh, as the rice milling and processing industries contribute a great deal to our economy and many people work in this field.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

The study relies primarily on primary data collected from employees of rice mills in the Sherpur District of Bangladesh. For respondent selection, the second was chosen from two types of mills, namely traditional processing and modern automated rice processing mills. Researchers have chosen automated rice mills to perform the survey because most of the mills are being automated day by day. Samples from Nokla Upazila and Sherpur sadar Upozila are chosen from the five Upazilas of the Sherpur district. In order to conduct the research procedure, random sampling was used to collect data; 110 respondents were randomly taken as a sample out of a total of 27 automated rice mills out of two upazilas. Taking into account the purpose of the study, an interview schedule containing both open and closed form questions was created to collect accurate and reliable information from the farmers. Researcher has considered two categories of workers *viz.* permanent and temporary workers. Total 50 permanent workers and 60 temporary workers have been taken as sample to conduct survey.

3.2 Data analysis and processing techniques

Researchers have categorized data into two groups, *viz.*, to interpret the collected data. Economic conditions and social situations. Chosen features of social circumstances, *viz.* Family size, education, age, marital status, male-female involvement, earning participants, work period, type of experience, labor law enforcement, violence, labor union facility, etc. were taken into account. Similarly, selected economic characteristics such as wage structure, basic salary, total salary, medical allowance, level of work satisfaction, etc. were taken into account. For clarity of understanding, researchers also used graphical representation, frequency table, in presenting results.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Social Conditions

Table 1: Age status of workers of rice mills industry in Sherpur district, 2018

Age group	Less than 25	25-35	35-45	Above 50	Total
Frequency	15 (13.64%)	60 (54.55%)	25 (22.73%)	10 (9.08%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Table 2: Male-female ratio of workers of rice-mill of Sherpur district, 2018

Male	Female	Total
90 (81.82%)	20 (18.18%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Table 3: Marital status of rice-mill workers in Sherpur district of Bangladesh, 2018

Marital status	Single	Married	Divorced	Widow(Women)	Others	Total
Frequency	24 (22.82%)	80 (72.73%)	2 (1.82%)	4 (2.63%)	00	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Most of the workers are belong to age level of young. The study finds that more than 50% of workers are young and most of them are married. Very few of them are women which are only 18.18% since most of the rice-mills are automated where women have little opportunity to work. Most of the workers are young aged between 30-45 because

they need to pull the heavy weight bags of Paddy and Rice in production place from Lorry and from lorry to production place. Among the workers surveyed, 72.73 percent are married and 22.82 percent are unmarried. It means that 23 percent of the unmarried garment workers are the main earners of their family.

Table 4: Family Members of workers of rice-mill in Sherpur district, 2018

Family members	1	2	3	4	5	Above 5	Total
Frequency	10 (9.09%)	28 (25.45%)	40 (36.36%)	30 (27.27%)	2 (1.8%)	00	110

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Table 5: Earnings Members of workers of rice-mill in Sherpur district, 2018

Earnings members	1	2	3	4	Above 4	Total 110
Frequency	50 (45.45%)	40 (36.36%)	20 (18.18%)	00	00	100%

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Cost of living is affected by the family members. Higher the number of family member higher will be the cost of living. Our study reveals that 63.63 percent of the workers have 3 or more family members whereas 81.11 percent workers have 1 or 2 earnings member. So it is found that most of the

workers have 3 or more dependents whose expenses are borne by only 1-2 earnings members. It is concluded that the cost of living of rice mill workers in Sherpur District is very high.

Table 6: Education level of workers of rice-mill in Sherpur district, 2018

Education level	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Illiterate	00	-	20	33.33	20	18.18
Can sign only	02	04	30	50	32	29.10
Class I-V	04	08	10	16.67	14	12.72
Class V-IX	20	40	00	0	20	18.18
Above Class X	24	48	00	0	24	21.82
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

The table reveals that no temporary laborers of rice-mills were literate above class X. 33.33% are illiterate and 50% can sign only, and rest of them are literate up to primary level, although 40% of permanent workers are literate up to above of secondary level and 40% permanent workers are up to class V-IX. It is evident from the table that the education level of workers which is considered as foundation for getting job is low. Since their lower level of

education is very low, pulling the heavy weight bags of Paddy and Rice in production place from Lorry and from lorry to production place is the main job of workers in rice mills. Because workers educational level is low, their work understanding and working capacity is expected to be poor. For this, they get poor remuneration and facilities from employers. (Chowudhury and Ullah, 2010).

Table 7: Nature of Job Experience of Rice-mill Workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Nature of job experience	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Unemployed	00	-	20	33.33	20	18.18
Agro based job	15	30	05	8.33	20	18.18
Rice-mills workers	30	60	10	16.67	40	36.36
Pulling bag of rice	00	-	10	16.67	10	9.09
Others	5	10	15	25	20	18.19
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Researcher’s field survey, 2018.

Table 8: Duration of Job Experience of Rice-mill Workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Duration of job experience	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 2 years	02	4	20	33.33	22	20
2-3 years	10	20	20	33.33	30	27.27
3-5 years	20	40	15	25	35	31.82
5-7 years	12	24	05	8.34	17	15.45
Above 7 years	06	12	00	00	06	05.45
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Researcher’s field survey, 2018.

Experience is an extra advantageous factor for getting a job and getting higher amount of remuneration in any organization (Chowudhury and Ullah, 2010). The survey finds that 60% of permanent workers have previous work experience in rice-mills sector and it is only 16.67% for temporary workers. Most of the workers have experience of

less than 3 years. Therefore, in most cases they are not capable of providing expected performance to the rice-miller and hence being deprived appropriate remuneration. Although there is an opportunity for local people to work as temporary laborer, opportunities to work as permanent workers (especially as technicians and assistant technician)

are limited for the local people because of lack of previous experience. Hence, most of the technicians are hired from

Rangpur, Bagura, Dinazpur, and Noagoan district of Bangladesh.

Table 9: Working hours of Rice-mill Workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Work hours	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 8 hours	00	00	00	00	00	00
8-9 Hours	00	00	00	00	00	00
9-10 Hours	10	20	00	00	10	9.09
10-12 Hours	35	70	00	00	35	31.82
Above 12 hours	05	10	60	100	65	59.09
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Table 10: Monthly overtime working hours of rice-mill workers (Permanent workers) of Rice-mills in Sherpur district, 2018

Monthly Overtime work hours	Number	Percent
0-30	10	20
31-60	25	50
61-90	10	20
Above 90	5	10
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

The worst condition of work in the rice-mill of Sherpur district is the long working hours. According to section 100 of the the Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) of 2006, no adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than 8 hours a day. Of the total workers surveyed, 59.09 percent work more than 12 hours a day, while 31.83 percent work more than 9 hours a day. Usual working time for rice-mill workers is 9 hours. Survey

found that they are not paid for overtime work. About 50 percent of the workers work more than 2 of hours overtime a day, while 20 percent work more than 3 hours of overtime a day.

Hence, they cannot provide much time for their family or children. As a result, they become unhappy in their family life.

Table 11: Nature of Harassment/Torture of rice-mill workers in Sherpur district, 2018

Structure	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No harassment	10	20	10	00	20	18.18
Physical	00	00	00	00	00	00
Mental	30	60	40	66.67	70	63.64
Sexual	00	00	00	00	00	00
Others	10	20	10	33.33	20	18.18
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

As per our survey result, about 70 percent of the workers are harassed/tortured mentally, and 18.18 percent in other ways. On the other hand, 18.18 percent of workers opined that there is no harassment at their workplace. It also found that there was no physical harassment and sexual harassment of

rice-mill workers, because very few female workers are in the rice-mill of Sherpur district. Increased level of education and awareness about labor rights keep harassment of the workers at the minimum level (Mahmud 2009).

Table 12: Job Environment of Rice-mill Workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Level	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very bad	00	-	00	-	00	00
Bad	06	12	02	3.33	08	07.27
Neutral	10	16	20	33.33	30	27.27
Good	32	64	28	46.67	60	54.55
Very Good	02	04	10	16.67	12	10.91
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Our survey finds that job or work environment is quite good in the surveyed rice-mills. Only 07% percent of the workers are dissatisfied with their job environment, while 65 percent are happy with their job environment and remaining 27

percent are neutral in this regard. Since the job environment is vital for workers for smooth functioning, better environment should be ensured by imposing rules and regulations of government regulatory bodies.

Table 13: Application of Labor law of Rice-mill Workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Class	Don't know	No application	Few application	Good application	Others	Total
Frequency	80 (72.72%)	20 (18.18%)	05 (4.45%)	00	05 (4.45%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, Factories Act of 1965 and the Factories Rules of 1979 all provide protection to labor force. Of the surveyed workers, 80 percent reported that they do not know about the application of labor laws in

their mills, while 25 percent of the workers reported that there is no or little application of the laws in their garment industries.

Table 14: Labor Union facilities of Rice-mill Workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Class	No union	Prohibited by owners	Manage top leaders	Others	Total
Frequency	70 (72.72%)	35 (18.18%)	00 (4.45%)	05 (4.45%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

According to section 176 of the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, workers, without distinction whatsoever, shall have the right to form trade union primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workers and employers or workers and workers and, subject to the constitution of the union concerned, to join trade union of their own choosing. The survey reveals that 72.72 percent of the workers said

that labor union did not exist in their factories because the owners and management were extremely averse to any types of ' of their workforce. 35 percent of the workers reported that trade unions are restricted by owners.

4.2 Economic Conditions

Table 15: Periodical Salary Structure of Rice mills workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Salary structure	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Weekly	00	-	00	-	00	00
Monthly	50	100	10	16.67	60	54.55
Hours worked	00	00	10	16.67	10	9.09
Units of works(pulling per bag)	00	00	40	66.66	40	36.36
No of unit within specified work hours	00	00	00	00	00	
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2018.

Table 16: Basic Salary (Tk.) Structure per month of Rice mills workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Salary structure	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Below 1000	00	00	04	6.67	04	3.64
1001-3000	10	20	40	66.67	50	45.45
3001-5000	11	22	10	16.67	21	9.09
5001-8000	20	40	06	16.67	26	19.09
Above 8000	09	18	00	00	09	8.18
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Table 17: Total salary Structure per month of Rice mills workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Salary structure	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
5000-6000	05	10	40	66.67	45	40.09
6001-10,000	15	30	15	25	30	27.27
10,000-15000	12	24	05	8.33	17	15.15
15001-20000	15	30	00	00	15	13.364
Above 20000	03	6	00	00	03	2.72
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Salaries and perquisites are the main factors that determine the economic position and life standard of workers. Our survey reveals that 40.09 percent of the rice-mill workers get Tk. 6,000 or less as total pay per month, which is really insufficient to lead their life with 3-4 dependent members in the family. Total salary of temporary workers is less than

that of permanent workers. Labors are very cheap in Bangladesh but they are employed in this industry to exploit the comparative advantages of their disadvantages like the low price of their labor, their low bargaining power, and their docility (Majumder & Begum 2000).

Table 17: Modes of Salary payment of Rice mills workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Payment dates	25 th last day	1 st -10 th day	10 th -15 th day	After 15 th day	Total
Frequency	00	27 (24.55%)	60 (54.54%)	23 (20.91%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

According to the section 123 of the BLA, 2006, the wages of every worker shall be paid within seven days after the expiry of the wage period. Our survey result shows that only 24.55 percent of the workers get their salary of the last month before 10th day of the next month, 54.54 percent get

their salaries of the last month before 15th day of the next month and 20.91 percent of the workers need to wait more than 15 days to get their salaries of the last month. The workers are not only deprived of appropriate amount of salary but also deprived of getting the salary in time.

Table 18: Bonus Structure of Rice mills workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Bonus system	On time attendance	Festival bonus	Regular attendance	Production efficiency	Total
Frequency	10 (9.09%)	80 (72.73%)	05 (4.55%)	15 (13.64%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Our survey result shows that about 84 percent of the workers get only festival bonus from their employers, 13.64 percent get bonus for production efficiency (technicians)

and 4.55 percent of the workers get bonus for regular attendance in the work. The millers may also pay a part of their profit to employee to encourage the workers.

Table 19: Medical Allowance System of Rice mills workers in Sherpur District, 2018

Medical allowances	No payment	Paid as per Medical documents	One time payments	Others	Total
Frequency	40 (36.36%)	66 (60%)	00	04 (3.64%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019

The surveyed result says that 40% of workers are paid no medical allowance, while 66% are paid allowance when they make accident during production. Although one of the basic needs of the human being is medical allowances from the employer but it is very unfortunate that there is fixed medical allowance for the workers of rice mills. If the technicians who are exposed to risk of accidents are given medical allowance when they are injured by accident during

machine running. According to the BLA 2006, in every establishment wherein three hundred or more workers are ordinarily employed, there shall be provided and maintained a sick room with dispensary of the prescribed size, containing the prescribed equipment or similar facilities, in the charge of such medical nursing staff as may be prescribed.

Table 20: Amount of savings per month of rice-mill workers of Sherpur District, 2018

Savings per month (TK.)	0-500	501-1000	1001-2000	Above 2000	Total
Frequency	35 (31.82%)	30 (27.27)	40 (36.36%)	10 (9.09%)	110 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Personal interview says that savings rate of permanent workers is higher than that of temporary workers. Saving is an important factor that affects the socio-economic condition of the workers. Survey result indicates that about

32 percent of the workers can save Tk. 500 or less per month and 40 percent of the workers can save Tk. 2,000 or less per month. Tendency of savings increasing over the time.

Table 21: Satisfaction of towards earnings of workers in rice mills in Sherpur district, 2018

Level of satisfaction	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very bad	10	20	00	00	10	9.09
Bad	12	24	02	3.33	14	12.73
Neutral	7	7	05	8.33	12	10.91
Good	21	42	50	83.33	71	64.55
Very Good	00	00	03	5.01	03	2.73
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Table 23: Satisfaction towards job of workers in rice mills in Sherpur district, 2018

Level of satisfaction	Permanent worker		Temporary worker		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very bad	04	8	00	00	8	7.27
Bad	11	22	02	3.33	13	11.82
Neutral	15	30	20	33.33	35	31.82
Good	20	40	30	27.27	50	45.45
Very Good	00	00	8	13.33	08	7.27
Total	50	100	60	100	110	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2018-March 2019.

Our survey finds that satisfaction level of the surveyed rice-mills workers rated, on an average, as good. Although they are satisfied with their earnings in rice mills, it does not mean that they are getting high earnings. What they are getting is good for them in the realization that they could be unemployed. Table also reveals that temporary workers are more satisfied than that of permanent workers.

5. Recommendations and conclusion

5.1 Recommendations

The study recommends the subsequent to shield the interest of the workers:

- a) Because the salaries paid by the rice-millers to employees are below customary (the quality) and such salaries negatively affect the life standard of the employees and create discontent among the employees. Therefore, the govt., and rice-millers ought to take initiative to supply commonplace quantity of salaries as per their position and services simply at the tip of the month.
- b) In most cases, the employees ought to work for more than twelve hours. Long operating hours thanks to engaging at additional regular and overtime hours produce several issues for the employees at their families and no payment is formed for additional operating time. If salaries and remuneration are multiplied up to a level of ordinary, then the intention of doing additional overtime are often reduced and so the length of operating hours are often reduced.
- c) Academic level of the employees is low; they work lower positions thanks to this their productivity is poor. Hence, they get poor salaries and that they cannot claim for additional. If the academic level of the employees are often developed then their productivity can increase. For academic development, the mill house owners ought to establish academic institutes and coaching centers.
- d) Though medical allowance may be a basic human would like, employees don't seem to be given medical allowance frequently. If the employees become separated at the time of production, the millers bear the expense of treatment value solely. That the millers ought to offer medical allowance on regular basis to enhance productivity of worker.
- e) Thanks to restrictions obligatory by the millers employees can't establish formal union as a dialogue agent. Millers shouldn't hinder in introducing trade union to shield the interest of employees.
- f) Quantitative relation of feminine worker is way less than male. To scale back gender discrimination feminine worker ought to be used to execute official functions.
- g) There's very little application of Labor laws during this section and in most cases rules and rules of this law are desecrated by the management of rice-mill. Government and millers ought to step up to confirm full application of labor laws and bear in mind of violation of rules and rules of labor laws.

6. Conclusion

In Bangladesh, almost 50 percent of rural employment is generated by the rice industry. Recently, there has been an upward trend in the amount of automation in rice mills and the development of new jobs in automated rice mills. Due to

the newly developed automated rice mills, many young people in rural and urban areas have been able to eliminate the curse of unemployment and improve their lifestyle. But the state of rice mill employees is very stressful. Staff in their workplace face different crises. Their low wages, an unfriendly working atmosphere, health concerns, nutrition, benefits, and medical problems should be resolved by timely government intervention. Power to reinforce rural and economic growth. So far, no steps have been taken to solve these issues. Overall, the development and climate of the rice-milling industry are hindered by these issues, and if these hurdles are not eliminated, the sector will be affected more and more in the coming days.

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