Promoting Health Behavior of University Students: A Systematic Review

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Abstract:

This systematic review developed a comprehensive conceptual framework to promote the health behavior of university students. A PRISMA-based approach was used to select high-quality, relevant studies for the research. In line with PRISMA guidelines, 18,192 articles were screened from databases including PubMed, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, resulting in 23 core studies being included. Conceptual analysis was applied to develop the framework, and thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The key attributes identified in the framework include improving physical health, enhancing psychological well-being, fostering social adaptation, achieving a balance between lifestyle and studies, and increasing overall knowlege and personal growth. These attributes are influenced by individual, social, environmental, and developmental factors. The consequences of promoting health behavior in university students span individual, social, and environmental impacts, with extended effects on society. The framework highlights the interrelationships among antecedents, attributes, and consequences of health promotion. It offers both theoretical and practical guidance for educational institutions and policymakers in strengthening health promotion efforts. The research findings indicate that promoting health behaviors not only improves academic performance and personal well-being but also contributes positively to the overall health and sustainable development of society. Additionally, further research is encouraged to refine and apply this conceptual framework to establish a model for promoting health behavior among university students.

Keywords: University students; Health behavior; Promoting health

การส่งเสริมพฤติกรรมสุขภาพของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัย: การทบทวนอย่างเป็นระบบ

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บทคัดย่อ

การทบทวนวรรณกรรมอย่างเป็นระบบนี้ได้พัฒนากรอบแนวคิดที่ครอบคลุมเพื่อส่งเสริมพฤติกรรมสุขภาพของนักศึกษาในมหาวิทยาลัย โดยใช้แนวทาง **PRISMA** ในการคัดเลือกการศึกษาที่มีคุณภาพสูงและเกี่ยวข้องสำหรับการวิจัย ตามแนวทาง **PRISMA** บทความ **18,192** บทความได้รับการคัดกรองจากฐานข้อมูลต่างๆ เช่น **PubMed, Web of Science** และ **Google Scholar** ส่งผลให้มีการรวมการศึกษาหลัก **23** เรื่อง การวิเคราะห์เชิงแนวคิดถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อพัฒนากรอบแนวคิด และใช้การวิเคราะห์เชิงหัวข้อในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล คุณลักษณะสำคัญที่ระบุไว้ในกรอบแนวคิด ได้แก่ การปรับปรุงสุขภาพกาย การเสริมสร้างความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีทางจิตใจ การส่งเสริมการปรับตัวทางสังคม การสร้างสมดุลระหว่างชีวิตและการศึกษา และเพิ่มการรู้หนังสือโดยรวมและการเติบโตส่วนบุคคล คุณลักษณะเหล่านี้ได้รับอิทธิพลจากปัจจัยส่วนบุคคล สังคม สิ่งแวดล้อม และการพัฒนา ผลที่ตามมาของการส่งเสริมพฤติกรรมสุขภาพในนักศึกษาในมหาวิทยาลัยครอบคลุมถึงผลกระทบต่อบุคคล สังคม และสิ่งแวดล้อม รวมถึงผลกระทบต่อสังคมในวงกว้าง กรอบแนวคิดเน้นย้ำถึงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างสาเหตุ คุณลักษณะ และผลที่ตามมาของการส่งเสริมสุขภาพ โดยให้คำแนะนำทั้งทางทฤษฎีและทางปฏิบัติแก่สถาบันการศึกษาและผู้กำหนดนโยบายในการเสริมสร้างความพยายามในการส่งเสริมสุขภาพ ผลการวิจัยระบุว่าการส่งเสริมพฤติกรรมสุขภาพไม่เพียงแต่ช่วยปรับปรุงผลการเรียนและความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีส่วนบุคคลเท่านั้น แต่ยังส่งผลดีต่อสุขภาพโดยรวมและการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนของสังคมอีกด้วย นอกจากนี้ ยังสนับสนุนให้มีการวิจัยเพิ่มเติมเพื่อปรับปรุงและนำกรอบแนวคิดนี้ไปใช้เพื่อสร้างแบบจำลองในการส่งเสริมพฤติกรรมสุขภาพในหมู่นักศึกษาในมหาวิทยาลัย

คำสำคัญ: นักศึกษาในมหาวิทยาลัย พฤติกรรมสุขภาพ การส่งเสริมสุขภาพ

1 Introduction

The health behavior of university students has become an increasingly significant concern in recent years. University life represents a critical stage in young adults' development, encompassing not only academic advancement and career preparation but also the formation of social responsibility and personal identity. During this transitional period, students often face numerous challenges, including academic stress, interpersonal difficulties, the pressure of future responsibilities, and financial burdens.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being (World Health Organization, n.d.). This holistic view underscores the importance of supporting students' comprehensive health during their university years. Research has shown that healthy students tend to perform better academically and are more likely to contribute positively to society (Auerbach et al., 2018). However, empirical studies also reveal that many university students are increasingly affected by health-related issues such as psychological distress, poor dietary habits, physical inactivity, and risky behaviors (Bruffaerts et al., 2019).

Despite the growing volume of research on student health, there is still a lack of integrative frameworks that holistically capture the factors influencing health behaviors in university settings. Most existing studies focus on isolated aspects, without synthesizing a comprehensive understanding that can inform effective interventions. In light of this, the present study conducts a systematic review to construct a conceptual framework for promoting health behavior among university students. By applying a rigorous PRISMA-based review process and thematic analysis, this paper aims to identify key influencing factors, analyze conceptual attributes, and provide a structured foundation for future research and practice in student health promotion.

This study seeks to contribute valuable theoretical and practical insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers striving to enhance student well-being. Furthermore, it offers a basis for the future development of an evidence-based model to guide the promotion of university students' health behaviors in a more effective and sustainable manner.

2 Purpose

To develop a conceptual framework of promoting health behavior of university students with prescription of all determinants.

3 Methods

This review was completed in accordance to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines for an effective selection of knowledge sources. Then, the concept analysis will be used to construct the conceptual framework of "promoting health behavior in university students"

4 Results

4.1 Search Method

The following databases were used for the search: 1) PubMed, 2) Web of Science, and 3) Google Scholar. The search was limited to studies published within the past ten years, from January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2024. The search terms used included "college/university students," "health behavior," and "concept," which were combined using the Boolean operator "AND." A comprehensive search was conducted in these three major scientific databases using the above keywords. Initially, studies that contained these keywords in the title and/or abstract were selected for further review. After identifying eligible studies, duplicate entries were removed, and full texts were

assessed against the eligibility criteria. Each author independently compiled a list of studies. The two authors then discussed their lists of included studies and collaboratively developed the final list.

4.2 Literature Exclusion Criteria

The following types of literature were excluded from the review: 1) papers that did not define the health behavior of college/university students; 2) papers that mentioned college/university students' health behavior in the title, keywords, or abstract but did not address it in the full text; 3) book chapters, book reviews, conference reports, reading materials, and editorials; 4) studies where participants were not college/university students; 5) papers published in languages other than English.

4.3 Literature screening

In accordance with the search strategy and exclusion criteria, the researchers conducted a three-step screening process: 1) an initial review based on titles, 2) an abstract review, and 3) a full-text assessment. After identifying eligible studies, duplicates were removed, and the full texts were evaluated according to the eligibility criteria. Two researchers independently performed the literature screening; in cases of disagreement, an expert was consulted to resolve conflicts. The expert engaged in discussions with the researchers until a consensus was reached. Figure 1 illustrates the flow diagram of the systematic literature review search process.

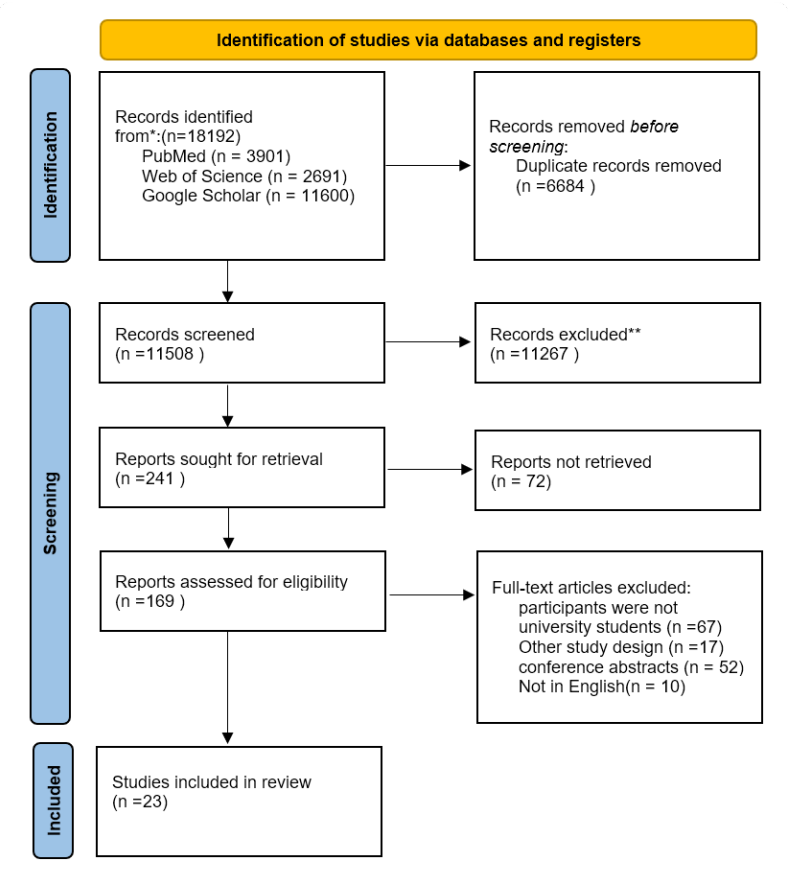


Figure 1 Flow diagram of the article selection process

4.4 Concept analysis

To develop a conceptual framework from the selected sources, concept analysis was applied including the 6-step approach proposed by Walker and Avant(2005). The first 3 steps will be used in the process of identifying the concept and the use of concepts as well as purpose of analysis (4.4.1-4.4.3). The second step of analyzing and synthesizing the content will lead to result of this study: identify the attributes, antecedents, and consequences of university students' health behavior.

4.4.1 Select a concept

University student health behavior was selected for the purpose of this study. Health behavior refers to the various behaviors and habits that individuals adopt in order to maintain and promote their own health, prevent diseases and improve the quality of life. It covers behaviors at the physiological, psychological and social levels involved in the process of health management, specifically including preventive behaviors, health- promoting behaviors and treatment adherence behaviors. The significance of university students health behavior lies in the fact that the health behavior at this stage has a profound impact on the long-term health of individuals. The university stage is a critical period for the formation of healthy behavior patterns. Scientific intervention can help university students establish a good lifestyle, thereby preventing the occurrence of chronic diseases and improving the quality of life in the future (Mehri et al., 2016). Health is not only the foundation of individual development, but also an important driving force for promoting sustainable social development. As the backbone of society, the health level of university students is directly related to the overall health and productivity of society. The concepts of health, university students and university students' health behavior were selected to complete the study.

4.4.2 Determine purposes of analysis

The purpose of concept analysis is to establish a conceptual framework for promoting health behavior in university students. Its main goal is to integrate multidisciplinary perspectives, systematically understand the key factors affecting university students' health behavior, attributes of university students' health behavior as well as the consequences of the university students' health behavior.

4.4.3 Identify all uses of the concepts

Conceptual analysis was based on a basic search of keywords from databases (PubMed, Google Scholar, and Web of Science), resulting in a total of 18192 articles. The 23 most relevant were selected for depth exploration to frame the "promoting health behaivior in university students".

4.4.4 Determine the defining attributes of the university students' health behavior and promoting health behavior of university students

4.4.4.1 University students' health behavior

The university students' health behavior was reviewed as shown in Table 1.

Table1. Category and description of the health behavior of university students

Category	**Definition**	**Description**
Physical Health	It involves behaviors such as diet, exercise, and rest to maintain proper functioning of the body.	Eat right, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, avoid smoking and alcohol, and have regular medical checkups.
Mental Health	Behaviors that involve regulating emotions and coping with psychological stress to maintain inner balance and a positive state.	Emotion management, meditation for stress reduction, counseling, building positive mental cognition and emotional coping mechanisms.
Social Health	The act of building good social relationships through social interactions and team activities.	Build healthy relationships, participate in volunteer activities, develop a spirit of cooperation, and avoid poor social behaviors.
Academic Health	Healthy behaviors involving learning and career development.	Scientific planning of study time, improving study efficiency, participating in academic discussions and research, and setting career development goals.
Moral and Ethical Health	Behavior that involves adherence to social norms and the practice of ethical principles.	Take exams with integrity, respect the rights of others, participate in public service activities, and fulfill social responsibilities.
Environmental Health	Behavior involving the protection of the natural environment and the maintenance of the health of living spaces.	Conserve resources, categorize garbage, reduce pollution, and participate in environmental protection activities.
Spiritual Health	Behaviors that involve the enhancement of one's intrinsic values and the pursuit of meaning.	Reading philosophical books, engaging in religious or spiritual reflection, participating in cultural

activities, and pursuing purpose and meaning in life.

4.4.4.2. Attributes of promoting health behavior of university students

The attributes that promote university students' health were reviewed and classified. We found that promoting health of the university students can be divided into the following five attributes: 1) improving physical health, 2) enhancing psychological health, 3) encouraging social adaptation and interpersonal relationships, 4) making life and study balance, and 5) increasing comprehensive literacy and growth.

1) Improving Physical Health

Physical health is the foundation of university students health and an important guarantee for their study and life. The attributes of physical health include:

a) Health awareness and behavioral practices

Health awareness is the foundation for university students to adopt health behaviors. Studies have shown that individuals with higher health awareness are more inclined to adopt preventive health behaviors, such as rational diet, regular exercise, and regular medical checkups. In addition, health awareness is also closely related to avoiding high-risk behaviors such as smoking and alcohol abuse (Almoraie et al., 2024). Enhancing health awareness can help university students establish a correct concept of life and develop healthy habits.

b) Risk avoidance and disease prevention skills

University students need to be able to recognize and avoid health risks, including the ability to prevent infectious diseases and respond to health emergencies. Behaviors such as regular vaccinations, personal hygiene, and appropriate use of health care resources are effective in reducing health risks (Khow et al., 2021). These competencies not only safeguard individual health but also contribute to the improvement of the public health environment.

2) Enhancing psychological Health

a) Emotion management and psychological adjustment

Emotion management skills are an important indicator of mental health. By learning emotion regulation techniques such as meditation, relaxation training, and counseling, university students are better able to cope with life and academic stress (Xu, Jaffri, & Yang, 2024).

b) mental toughness and coping skills

Mental toughness is an individual's ability to recover in the face of setbacks. Research has shown that students with high mental toughness are more effective in coping with academic stress and social conflict (Khow et al., 2021).

3) Encouraging social adaptation and interpersonal relationships

a) Social communication skills and teamwork

Social interaction skills are crucial for university students to integrate into campus life. Participation in teamwork, volunteerism, and club activities can enhance university students' interpersonal communication skills and teamwork abilities (Moore ,2017). By participating in team activities, university students can develop a sense of cooperation and broaden their social networks. The enhancement of social skills helps to build effective interpersonal relationships in future career development.

b) Intercultural adaptability

For university campuses under the trend of internationalization, it is especially important to cultivate students' intercultural understanding and adaptability. Intercultural communication activities can help university students understand and respect diversity and enhance social adaptability (Wang et al., 2018). This suggests that participation in diverse cultural activities can help university students better integrate into the globalized environment.

4) Making life and study balance

a) Time management and efficiency improvement

Time management skills are an important tool for university students to balance academics and life. Behaviors such as planning time wisely, setting learning goals, and avoiding procrastination can significantly enhance academic efficiency and quality of life (Baird et al., 2021). Research has shown that time management is an important strategy for improving academic efficiency and life satisfaction.

b) Stress management and psychological adjustment

University students need to face a variety of stresses in their study and life, such as academic load and social pressure. By learning stress management techniques such as exercise, interest cultivation, and social support, stress can be effectively relieved and life satisfaction can be improved (Chazan, Pelletier, & Daniels, 2021). These approaches emphasize the central role of psychological regulation in stress management.

5) Increasing comprehensive literacy and growth

a) Self-management and lifelong learning skills

Self-management skills are the foundation for university students to achieve their personal goals and improve their learning. By setting clear academic and career goals, university students are able to take the initiative to learn and improve their skills (Abdullah ,2019). This research suggests that self-management skills are a key factor in personal growth and career development.

b) Social responsibility and moral literacy

University students are the core force of the future society, and their moral literacy and sense of responsibility directly affect the harmonious development of society. Participation in volunteer activities and social welfare programs can enhance university students' sense of social responsibility and moral practice (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). The research results show that social welfare activities play an important role in developing students' sense of social responsibility.

4.4.5 Determine the defining antecedents of promoting health of university students

The antecedents of university students health basing on systematic review include individual level factors, Social and environmental-level factors, and Developmental and adaptive-level factors.

4.4.5.1 Individual level factors

Individual-level prerequisites encompass the core drivers of healthy behaviors among university students, including physical health, mental health, and intrinsic personal motivation. Physiological health is the foundation of healthy behaviors, with a good level of physical fitness and a healthy immune system providing for active participation in a variety of activities (Smith et al., 2020). Mental health provides important support for healthy

behaviors through mental resilience and emotional regulation, and research has shown that students who are mentally stable are more likely to maintain a healthy lifestyle (Brown & Green, 2019). In addition, intrinsic motivation and self- efficacy are important sources of motivation for behavioral persistence, and students with strong intrinsic motivation and clear health goals tend to be more persistent in their behavioral implementation (Brown & Green, 2019).

4.4.5.2 Social and environmental- level factors

The social and environmental dimensions involve the support and influence of the external environment in which university students live on their health behaviors, including social support, cultural climate, and resource conditions. Social support, such as help from family and friends as well as the school, not only provides emotional comfort but also facilitates access to practical resources and information (Gerich, 2014). A healthy campus culture, such as encouraging physical activity or hosting mental health seminars, can environmentally promote healthy behaviors (Gerich, 2014). Meanwhile, the availability of resources, such as healthy food, medical services, and fitness facilities, also plays an important role in guaranteeing the achievement of healthy behaviors (Johnson, Nandan, Culp, & Thomas, 2023).

4.4.5.3 Developmental and adaptive- level factors

The developmental and adaptive dimensions focus on university students' adjustment and behavioral shaping to the external environment during specific developmental stages. The university stage is a critical period of transition from adolescence to adulthood, in which students need to face multiple challenges of academic pressure, career planning, and social role changes, and these developmental needs motivate them to adapt to the environment through healthy behaviors (Abdullah ,2019). The ability to adapt to new environments, such as the ability to live independently and cross-cultural adaptation, in turn, helps university students integrate more quickly into a diverse campus community, which enhances the performance of their health behaviors. In addition, clear academic and career goals not only provide behavioral direction, but also become important motivators for university students to balance stress and maintain healthy behaviors.

4.4.6 Define the consequences of the promoting health of university students

University students' health behaviors include the individual level, the social and environmental level, and extended influences. First, at the individual level, health behaviors can significantly improve university students physical fitness, strengthen the immune system, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases (Lederer et al. , 2024) . Meanwhile, meditation and relaxation training can enhance mental health and well-being, as well as increase self-efficacy and develop good life management skills. Second, at the social and environmental level, health behaviors improve interpersonal relationships by engaging in social activities, promote the spread of a culture of health, and reduce the burden on society's healthcare resources by reducing the need for healthcare (Miller et al., 2017) Finally, at the extended level, healthy behaviors enhance university students career competitiveness and stress resistance, promote the awareness of sustainable development, and help them form a lifelong health philosophy and achieve family and social transmission of healthy behaviors (Lederer et al., 2024). Taken together, health behaviors not only enhance the physical and mental health of university students, but also contribute significantly to social progress and sustainable

development by promoting social and environmental improvement and continuity.

5 Conclusion

This study integrates the PRISMA framework with the conceptual analysis steps outlined by Walker and Avant, analyzing and synthesizing the concept of promoting health behavior among university students. The attributes of university students' health behavior include physical health, psychological health, social adaptation, interpersonal relationships, life-study balance, comprehensive literacy, and personal growth.

The antecedents of university students' health behavior encompass individual- level factors, social and environmental factors, as well as developmental and adaptive factors. The consequences of these behaviors span individual- level outcomes, social and environmental impacts, and broader extended effects.

As illustrated in Figure 1, there is a clear relationship between the antecedents, attributes, and consequences of university students' health behavior, suggesting a dynamic and interconnected model.

However, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the analysis relies heavily on available literature, which may not capture emerging trends or newer research in this area. Future studies could explore longitudinal designs to better understand the long-term impact of health behaviors on university students. Additionally, more diverse student populations should be considered to expand the generalizability of the findings. Future research could also investigate specific interventions or strategies to promote health behavior more effectively.

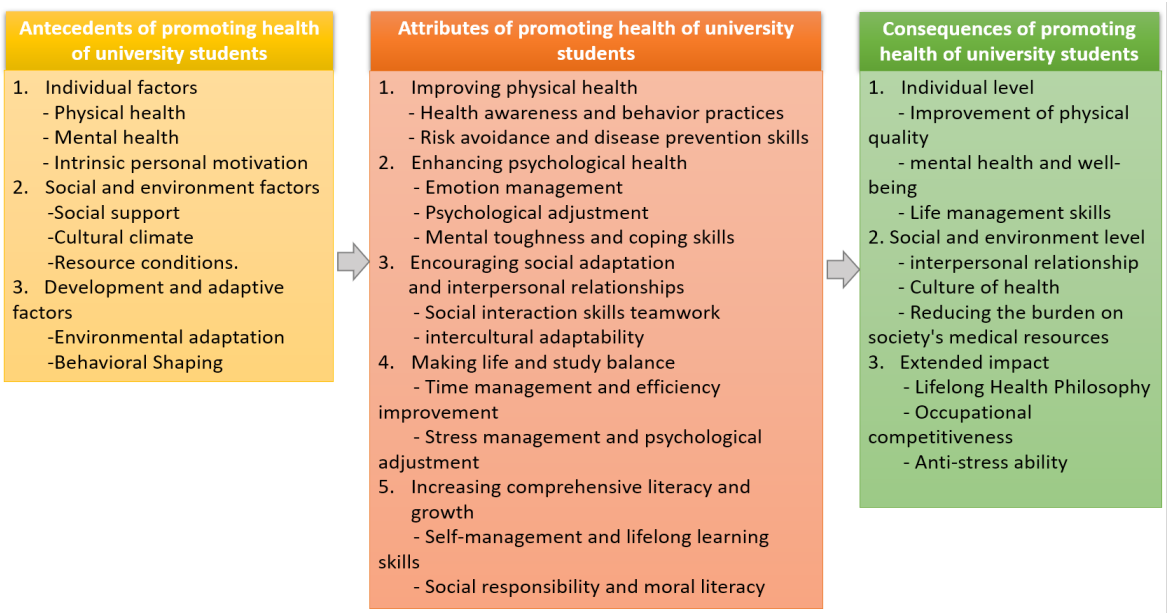


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of promoting health behaviors of university students

6 Discussion

The concept of " healthy behavior" in university students is underpinned by several prerequisites, including the individual's physical well- being, mental health, intrinsic personal motivation, social support, cultural atmosphere, available resources, environmental adaptability,

and behavioral development. These factors collectively shape the multi-dimensional nature of health and behavior in university students, which spans across physical, psychological, social adaptation, and lifestyle dimensions.

The realization and maintenance of the "Healthy Behavior of University Students" concept not only contribute to the healthy growth of university students but also enhance their overall quality of life. This comprehensive health approach encompasses not just academic performance, but also emotional, social, and future developmental benefits for students.

Furthermore, the promotion of healthy behavior among university students can have a broader impact on the campus environment, such as fostering a more supportive and resource-efficient setting. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in the conservation of social resources and the dissemination of a pervasive healthy culture, benefiting not just individual students but society at large.

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