

## Probing Alcohol Abuse amongst the Youth of Musina Community in Limpopo Province of South Africa

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**ABSTRACT** This paper was influenced by the study recently conducted in a small community that resides in Musina Village in Limpopo, about 200 miles away from Tshwane, South Africa. The study sought to establish the causes of alcohol abuse and how this scourge can be addressed. The study further sought to show that alcohol consumption amongst the youth turns to disrupt their studies and goals in life and also alters their physical appearance, and leads to teenage pregnancy and increased drop-out rates at school as well as sexually transmitted diseases. This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of collecting data. The instruments used in the process of collecting data were questionnaires, checklist and scales. A focus group was also established in order to gather qualitative data from the participants. The quantitative data was measured by specific variables that could be quantified by rating scales and generalized findings from a large population where the sample was drawn from. Tables, numbers and percentages presenting the responses of the respondents were used. The findings of this research are that most of teenage mothers fall pregnant at the age of 18 years. Lack of parental guidance is the main factor that influences teenage pregnancy.

### INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism remains a daunting problem in our modern societies which are beset by high levels of stressors. People over the world drink alcohol for different reasons. Alcohol intake can be problematic especially when it is taken by those considered to be underage. Ethyl alcohol or ethanol is a psychoactive drug found in beer. Wine and hard liquor is produced by the fermentation of yeast. Alcohol is a central system depressant. It is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestines. It passes into the bloodstream and then widely distributed throughout the body.

The concern here is alcohol abuse amongst the youth and the impact it has on them. The rest of the world is experiencing alcohol abuse. According to WHO (World Health Organization 2013), the global burden of alcohol in terms of death and disability in 2013 was between 1.8 percent in developing countries and 11 percent for developed regions. South Africa is a high mortality developing country. It has recently been calculated that alcohol-related harm accounted for 7.1 percent of all deaths.

The abuse of alcohol will have a negative impact if nothing is done about this pandemic. The government has noticed the seriousness of this matter and is presently taking action to stop alcohol abuse amongst the youth. Most of the alcohol abusers are young people who make up the majority of the population. For so many years a great number of authors have researched about the causes of alcohol abuse all over the world and have concluded that this is increasing at an alarming rate. Alcohol abuse can affect a person in so many different ways such as socially; economically and even in terms of health. This cannot be ignored any longer because young people are our future and also leaders of tomorrow. But what kind of future will they have as they are on the road towards self- destruction?

Alcohol abuse has been linked with many criminal activities in South Africa (see Shilakwe 2005; Sutton 2007). Young people are more vulnerable when they are drunk especially the girls. Young people tend to take risks especially when they are drunk. Many of those risks sometimes lead them to imprisonment. Just under half of all prisoners had consumed alcohol or drugs at the time or before committing their most recent crime (WHO 2013).

An alarming increase in the rate of young people who are abusing alcohol in South Africa answers to the reason why everyone is working together to come up with ways of solving this problem. Young people are very ignorant and they fool themselves by thinking they know everything and that they can stand for the consequences of their actions. HIV/AIDS is also on the increase and many young people are infected and affected by this pandemic. Young people tend to experiment on sex when drunk. Mostly they do this because they are too drunk to think clearly or they are trying to prove maturity to their peers. It is estimated that 12 percent of young people who are HIV positive are linked to alcoholism (Sutton 2007). Research shows that the consumption of drugs in South Africa is twice that of the world norm. 15 percent of South Africans have drug problems. According to Shilakwe (2005), drug abuse is costing the country R20-billion a year.

Alcohol abuse among young people is caused by a multiple of factors. Young people are at a stage where they are exploring new things and some of those are alcohol abuse. Peer pressure is one of the contributors to alcohol abuse because young people are trying to form a relationship so that they can have a sense of belonging. The environment where an individual was raised also plays a role in the abuse of alcohol.

South Africa, like any other country in the world, has laws and policies guiding people on the consumption of alcohol. The South African law states that no child under the age of 18 should be sold alcohol and that anyone who violates this law shall be prosecuted or have their license (permit) taken away from them. Everyone who is selling alcohol should have a permit that allows them to sell alcohol.

The world is connected like a chain. This means that whatever happens in one country one way or another it's going to affect the other country. It need to be said that South Africa is a country that is still developing as the result there are laws that are still being drawn to address the historical imbalances that were created by the Apartheid regime. Alcohol drinking in the country is not something that started after the 1994 democratic dispensation. It has been going on for quite some time. However, There was little research done in this respect.

Of particular concern is that when a country is experiencing general and drastic socio-economic challenges as in the case in South Africa, many of her citizenry find solace in alcohol consumption. Alcohol intake has a tendency of temporarily easing down the tough economic conditions people experience. It provides some sort of solitude and ecstasy to the victims of poverty.

Statistics show that there is an increase in the level of alcohol consumption amongst the youth especially in South Africa. Almost 30 percent of the country has an alcohol problem and alcohol affects 17.5 percent of South Africans. Studies by Shilakwe (2005) and Hoffman et al. (2016) show that young people who start drinking at the age of 15 are four times likely to become alcoholics.

#### **Statistics on Alcohol Abuse in South Africa**

Alcohol abuse in South Africa is of a major concern mostly because it affects everyone. In 2008, SANCA (South African National Council on Alcoholism) reported an increase in 19-20 year old alcoholics. 18-22 year olds being the group of the heaviest alcohol abusers. About 35 percent of high school kids are problem drinkers who drink at least 9 units of spirits or 1 wine or 2 liters of beer per day. Young people who abuse alcohol have three times more chances of being involved in crime. 50 percent of Grade 11 learners admitted to have used alcohol and 31 percent of them drank socially.

#### **Factors Contributing to Alcohol Abuse amongst the Youth**

##### *Psychological Factors*

It has been established that Alcohol has a link with poverty and dysfunctionality in most families (Hoffman et al. 2016) these families use it to try to forget about their problems. This doesn't mean that the privileged don't abuse alcohol. The abuse is reported widely amongst the impoverished. A lot of people use alcohol to try to forget about their problems but because alcohol is a depressant that only paralyzes the brain for a certain moment Individuals will have to use it more and more to deal with their psychological problems (Shilakwe 2005). The youth

have a lot of things to learn as they are still developing and understanding more about themselves. As individuals. They end up doing wrong things and they end up using alcohol to deal with their problems.

### ***Peer Pressure***

Young people are at a stage where they are trying to determine who they really are and their role in the society. All this they do with the hope of trying to belong. Because they want to keep their friends and to impress them, they end up letting them put pressure on them and doing things to please them mostly by drinking. According to Shilakwe (2005), many young people see the use of alcohol as a passage towards adulthood. When they are drunk they end up getting into meaningless fights and engage in sexual activities that mostly end up in serious consequences. They engage in all these activities for fear of being rejected by the peers. If rejected, most of them feel depressed and start to have suicidal thoughts because they feel less important in life (Sudhinaraset et al. 2016).

### ***Alcohol Advertisement***

South African laws on alcohol have tightened somewhat especially when it comes to advertisement of alcohol in the media. These advertisements are said to be the ultimate causes of alcohol abuse amongst the youths. Young people now have so much time on their hands and they spend it watching television and playing games. Because of this boredom, they tend to slide towards the consumption of alcohol. Every 5 minutes, they see alcohol being advertised on television. This advertisement always shows the good side of drinking alcohol and the age restriction is shown in small letters. Most of these adverts show alcohol consumers as wise and strong. This makes young males to want to try it out as they don't want to be seen as weak and timid (May et al. 2016).

### ***Family Factors***

Some parents contribute highly to alcohol abuse by not being good role models to their kids. Young people look up to their parents as

role models. That is why they try by all means to emulate them. Some parents do not see anything wrong in drinking in front of their children. They also have alcohol stored in their fridges and within reach of their children. So this sort of behavior drives the children into drinking. Parents who abuse alcohol end up abusing their own family. De Vos (2011) further stressed that young people will drink in order for them to forget their stressful situations at home. Parents need to take a positive role in their families in order for the young people to have someone to look up to as a role-model.

### ***Poor Economic Conditions***

Alcohol has become affordable to anyone but it is said that the more expensive the alcohol the more percentage of alcohol it has. Most young people want to show off to their friends that they can afford and have status among their peers. So they end up going for spirits which are more dangerous and expensive. Since they are still dependent it means they can't always afford this. So they steal and do other foolish things in order to get alcohol. This puts their lives at risk. Some of the young people are disadvantaged and lack some of the assets that are seen as status symbols in many communities. They end up drinking in order to forget their economic perils (Ward et al. 2016).

### ***Consequences of Alcohol Abuse***

Intake of alcohol can be good to the body of an individual but as long as it is not abused. When you take alcohol to a point where you become dependent on it, it makes the person's physical well-being weak and you become more exposed to infections. When people drink excessively, they stunt one part of their brain and they end up embarrassing themselves with their untoward actions. Young people are very ignorant and sometimes take risks which are very deadly (Sudhinarest et al. 2013). Most of them refuse to be warned about alcohol. When intoxicated they are clumsy and even indulge in unprotected sex, thus falling pregnant and getting exposed to sexually transmitted diseases. For the young women this can be so depressing such that they will end up dropping out of school. Some of them run away from their homes

because of the embarrassment they caused to their families.

Many young girls drink while they are pregnant which is totally wrong because it may result in a miscarriage or down-syndrome in babies. Having a disabled child who suffers from Down syndrome is another problem and many end up abandoning or killing their babies who suffer from this disease. When a young person abuses alcohol it is not just their problem but even that of the whole family. Young males often become outcasts and resort to criminal activities. Young girls even end up into prostitution hoping to find the love they did not get from their parents and partners (Grant et al. 2001).

### Statement of the Problem

Young people are still learning about themselves and their surroundings. The results of alcohol abuse tend to be more than what they can handle. Alcohol abuse among young people in Musina creates a gap between the society and the young as it largely has a negative stigma in the society. It also has a negative impact on their professional careers. Alcohol is also linked with the increase of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) among young people as well as pregnancy in Musina. The mortality rate is also on the increase and alcohol plays a role in this regard.

### Purpose of the Study

This study sought to establish the root causes of alcohol abuse and how this scourge can be addressed. The study also helped in having an in-depth understanding on why so many young people are consuming alcohol in Musina in spite of the fact that they know about its brutal consequences. The study was also prompted by the alarming rate of alcohol consumption amongst the South African Youths.

### Study Objectives

- ♦ Probe the psycho-social factors that contribute to the abuse of alcohol amongst the youth.
- ♦ Establish solutions to curb alcohol abuse.
- ♦ Analyze the consequence of alcohol abuse.

- ♦ Investigate the role of the family in curbing alcohol abuse amongst the youth of Musina.

### Research Questions

- ♦ What are the psychological factors that influence young people to abuse alcohol?
- ♦ What are the solutions inherent in the process of curbing alcohol abuse in Musina?
- ♦ What are the consequences of alcohol abuse among the young people?
- ♦ What is the role of the family in curbing this scourge?

### Significance of Study

This study was significant in that it would help the government and other stake-holders to come up with policies that will address alcohol abuse in many of our communities. It also offers statistics as to the number of families that are affected by this pandemic and helps in the process of counseling those who are closely affected.

### Delimitation of the Study

This study was only limited to Musina village in the district of Vhembe.

## METHODOLOGY

This research used triangulation (both quantitative and qualitative ways of collecting data) to double check as to the validity of the collected data. Questionnaires were also distributed in the community to establish the age of the respondents and their demographics as well as the level of education and economic standing. The purpose of the quantitative research approach was to collect and evaluate objective data which consisted of numbers while qualitative research dealt with subjective data that is produced by the views of the participants who formed a focus group.

### Study Location

The study was conducted in Musina. The study comprised of those young parents who were still at school in any level of study as well

as those who have dropped out and/or were at home and residing in the village.

### Sampling

Sampling is the method of selecting a portion from a population (Creswell 2014). The sample was made out of 60 young parents (Almost 30 males and 30 females) who filled the questionnaires. The researchers used two types of sampling procedures which are judgmental and snowball sampling in choosing the ten (10) participants who would form part of the focus group (see Creswell 2014).

### Research Instrument

The research instruments used when collecting data were questionnaires and a focus group. The questionnaire instrument was based on an established set of questions with fixed wording and sequence of possible answers (Creswell 2014) while a focus group allowed for the participants to voice their feelings pertaining to the scourge.

### Research Ethics

Throughout the process of the study the researchers pursued the cooperation between themselves and the participants. The researchers were aware of the fact that the lack of cooperation would lead to incompletely filling out of questionnaires and even non-response. The researchers also respected the respondents decision to participate or not to. The main ethical principle that the researchers conducted was informed consent where they informed the respondents about the aim, purpose of the research and what was required of them as participants. The data from the participants was treated with anonymity; meaning that the data was not stated with their names or any other identifiers but rather assigned a number for the questionnaire which helped to recall whether it was a male or a female who responded to that questionnaire. The researchers assured participants that they won't be identified by names or any other way when the results are published.

### Data Collection

The collection of data was done by way of distributing the questionnaires to the respondents to fill. The respondents answered freely

because they did not feel uncomfortable when answering questions; unlike if they were answering through face-to-face interviews (Creswell 2014).

### Data Analysis

When analyzing data, the researchers used tables, numbers and percentages presenting the responses of the respondents.

## RESULTS

### Youth Who Abuse Alcohol in the Study

The researchers collected information from males and females who abuse alcohol. Their age group was between 12- 35. The respondents were from Musina community. Musina municipality in the Vhembe district of Limpopo province. The biological information of respondents is shown by the Table 1.

**Table 1: Ages of respondents**

	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Between the ages of 12-15	1	10
Between the ages of 16-20	40	60
Between the ages of 21-26	10	20
Between the ages of 27-35	10	20
Total	60	100

Table 1 shows that young people between the ages of 16-20 are abusing alcohol more than any other group of people in this municipality.

**Table 2: The gender of respondents**

	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Male respondents	40	60
Female respondents	20	40
Total	60	100

Table 2 shows that the number of male respondents is slightly higher than that of female respondents. It also shows that alcohol abuse does not only affect male but also females in this municipality.

Table 3 shows that the number of respondents who are still at secondary level are abusing alcohol the most. Another serious concern

**Table 3: Level of education of respondents**

	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Secondary level	32	60
Tertiary level	12	20
Graduates	8	10
School dropout	8	10
Total	60	100

is that the drop-out rate in high schools in this municipality is growing at an alarming rate. The number of high school graduates has lowered tremendously.

**Table 4: Years of drinking**

	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Between 1-3 years	10	30
Between 4-6 years	34	50
Between 7 years-more	16	20
Total	60	100

**Responses from the Focus Group**

***Psychological Factors Contributing to Alcohol Abuse***

*Jacob* (Nume de plume) said the reason why he started to abuse alcohol was that all his friends were drinking and he always felt left out when they were doing it. He didn't want to lose them. He thought he should start drinking too. This made him feel like he belongs.

*Sarah* said at first she did not want to drink but felt out of place when she was with a boyfriend and all the girls at the club where doing it and the boyfriend seemed to like it. She loved him so much and did not want to lose him and he would sometimes make remarks like "you are boring" or "you are a party spoiler". *Lesego* who was raised by his uncle said he thought that only strong men are the ones who drink and the strength of the man was determined by the level of his alcohol consumption.

*Mashudu* said that lately young people are into showing off what they've got in order to gain respect amongst their peers. Another way of showing off among the youth is by buying expensive drinks and how many beers they have and how many times do they drink on a weekly basis. Some of them are just participating in this

orgy of alcohol drinking to please their colleagues.

*Mary* also experimented with alcohol when she was a student. She said that it appeared to be a good thing at that time but now she regrets it. Other respondents said that the reason why they started abusing alcohol was that they admired other students. It seemed like an 'in' thing. Psychologically many young people don't realize what is happening to them. Many young people are afraid to talk to anyone about what they are going through because they believe that they are misunderstood. They end up having many unresolved problems. As a result they take to drinking to ease their stress levels.

*Jacob* said that most young people drink alcohol as they believe it helps them relax. But unfortunately it damages some of the brain nerves. Once someone abuses alcohol starting at a tender age. It can damage some of the body organs and subsequently lead to death.

*Tshepo* said that when he was growing up he used to see other young people and even the elderly drinking. He thought there was nothing wrong with this picture. But he started noticing its effects when he was already an alcoholic.

***Social Factors Contributing to the Abuse of Alcohol***

*Kabelo* said that one of the reasons many young people in the community of Musina are abusing alcohol is because there are many taverns/clubs where many young people can access alcohol easily. For him and some of his friends; it was easy because they stayed next to the *shebeen* and a night club. They would simply send some of the elderly to buy some beers for them.

*Radzilani* said at primary school he used to play soccer and participated in other sporting activities. Unfortunately. These sporting facilities were not well kept and were dilapidated. That is when most of them started to while away time through alcohol drinking. So many young people like him have a lot of free time on their hands. They end up getting bored and the only sort of entertainment they have is to spend time with friends and by doing so they will drink. Besides going to school during the course of the week many young people have almost nothing to do during weekends.

Young people are easily influenced and most of them tend to do things they learn from others. Many young people in the community look up to those who seem to have money and to live a good life. With the improvement in technology now young people are exposed to a lot of things. They learn most of the habits that were the preserve of the elderly during the olden days. Their role-models are no longer academicians, Intellectuals and/or doctors. Rather, they envy those who are able to win tenders (what are called tenderpreneurs) because they can show off their wealth. The impression is that those who enjoy life are the ones who have quick money and are always surrounded by girls and a lot of booze.

*Michael* said that he started drinking at home. Many people still believe that it is acceptable for a young man to drink as it shows that they are growing from being a boy into a man. *Tshepho* said that the reason why many young people end up abusing alcohol is the fact that there are fewer opportunities for them to better their lives. Many young people drink because they are trying to forget about their problems. As for *Tebogo* he was doing all this to try to forget the fact that he is not working. The stress of being unemployed is bad and he had to find ways to survive and support his family and himself. He said he also believes this is what is leading many young people into criminal activities. One of the younger respondents said that he thinks that the reason why young people are abusing alcohol is that many of them are orphans and they do not have a proper guidance in life. Most parents and the community leaders appear unconcerned when it comes to this problem.

#### ***Family Factors Contributing to the Abuse of Alcohol***

*Rhadzilani* indicated that young people; apart from having their own problems are also inundated with the stress that their parents are experiencing. This stress can be caused by poverty or unemployment in most instances. Sometime they find themselves in the middle of family problems and because of their age they can't deal or handle some of the stressors. Most parents tend to drag their children into their fights. The divorce rate in South Africa is too high and in most cases children are the ones who are affected most but little attention is paid to them. Since they can't understand why all this is hap-

pening they sometimes end up blaming themselves for the situation they are into and they find solace in indulging in alcohol in order to forget the negative experiences at home.

His friend, *Mmagauta* responded by saying most families exclude them in family matters and they are mostly not listened to. As a result, they end up lost and eventually end up following what their friends are doing without questioning the merits of their actions.

People are very different. Siblings are also different. Others are inhibited whilst others are extroverted. Parents tend to like those who seem to be outgoing and smarter thus marginalizing those they think are slower. This gives them (the slow learners at home) feel like they are not liked. This leads to a serious rivalry amongst the children. Some parents will compare or make remarks which will make the less gifted child feel less special. This leads to conflict amongst the children. Most families struggle to survive and live in bad conditions because they are poverty stricken. This creates a negative environment for the kids.

#### ***Consequences of Alcohol Abuse among the Youth***

Curiosity is something that is killing young people around the world and also in the community of Musina. Young people are at a stage where they like experimenting on things they know nothing about. *Sarah* said when she fell pregnant it's not because she wanted to but she was always drunk and most of the time she couldn't even remember what has happened to her the previous night. She did not know that she had a problem until it was too late. Even after she fell pregnant she continued drinking. Her boyfriend left her after he realized that she was pregnant. She was now faced with the fact of raising the baby on her own and dealing with the disappointment from the parents, stigma from the community and other peers at school and home. All this was too much and that made her continue abusing alcohol as she didn't know how or whom to talk to about this problem.

*Jacob* said that most of the time when he was drunk he used to end up in many fights and that meant that he had to go to jail. Every time when he was drunk he felt as if he could do anything he liked. He would end up in jail and feeling remorseful. Most of the teenagers end

up doing things that eventually make them feel so remorseful the day after (for example assaulting people, rape, stealing and sometimes murder).

*David* was a smart student and had good grades. But this happened when he was still a disciplined student and free from alcohol abuse. His behavior changed the minute he started abusing alcohol. Sometimes he would drink to a point of forgetfulness. He started neglecting his work and eventually failed his exams because he was no longer attending. Now that he dropped out of school he spends most of his time drinking or doing odd jobs.

*Tshepo* said that most of young people who abuse alcohol are sick. Many are into prostitution because they have reached a point where they would like to have money so that they can feed their bad habits. Many young boys when they are drunk tend to try to show off that they are grown up. It is believed that many young people become more sexually active when drunk. They end up not using protection when having sex. This in most cases leads to sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

## DISCUSSION

Research findings showed that the reason many young people ended up abusing alcohol is that many families/households did not take part in the upbringing of their kids (Champion et al. 2015). Communication in most of these families was very low. Most parents do not know what their children are doing and who they spend their time with. Dixon and Chartier (2016) further stressed this point by saying that parents should be more involved in their children's lives and talk and also learn to listen to what they have to say. Many of South Africans still live in abject poverty. It is, therefore, imperative that the government and the community as a whole came up with projects which will help those families which have been marginalized from the economy of the country. This can be done by way of equipping people (especially the youth) with skills so that they can be part of the mainstream economy. Parents should try not to be too protective when it comes to their children but they must also show them that they can't do as they please. De Vos (2011) further indicated that parents should learn to let their children be children and stop including them in matters that don't con-

cern them. The role of parents have to be clearly defined so that the children can know their boundaries when communicating with them (Champion et al. 2015). According to the South African National Council on Alcoholism (2008) when most of the young people are drunk they tend to take deadly risks. In most instances they experiment with driving and street fights as the data has indicated. These often lead to fatalities such as death. If imprisoned it means that their future is ruined as they will be having a criminal record.

Most of the respondents believe that this problem can be solved. Tebogo said that for one to solve this problem we must start with those who are abusing alcohol. Counseling the alcoholics might lead them to having a fruitful life and changing their ways.

Jacob responded by saying that it would be great if sporting facilities can be encouraged. This might take young people away from abusing alcohol. Many of them can start realizing the talents which they never thought they had.

Young people should be encouraged to become active citizens by way of attending to serious matters that build their communities instead of destroying them. This will increase their leadership skills and to become better persons. They can also form their own projects or an organization which focuses on helping other young people to empower themselves.

David said that even though alcohol can be abused by one or two individuals, its consequences don't only affect them but the whole community. So each and everyone needs to work together. Lesego said that in order to reduce these problems. The young should be actively involved in building their communities.

Tshepo elaborated further on what was said by Tebogo. He indicated that schools and churches need to take a lead in the fight against alcoholism in the community. The youth should take part in organizations that are meant to empower communities.

Michael said that many young people like to put blame where it is not supposed to be directed. He further stated that it is about time that the young should stop playing the blame game and be involved in building their communities instead of spending more time watching television and participating in destructive activities. He further said that the way in which alcohol is being advertised is a bit too much. He believes



that TV and the Internet can also play a role in the destruction of young people's lives.

### CONCLUSION

Findings show that the rate of teenage pregnancy is high as many of the teenagers engage in sexual intercourse mostly because they are drunk. Falling pregnant at a young age can be a problem as the body of the female is still developing. This can cause miscarriages. School drop-out rate is also high as many young people are unable to concentrate in classes. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is high amongst the teenagers who abuse alcohol. The youth therefore need to be educated about these risks so that their livelihoods can improve for the better.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Counseling the alcoholics might lead them to having a fruitful life and changing their ways. It would be great if sporting facilities can be erected in all townships and villages so as to encourage the youth to partake in healthy living. This might take young people away from abusing alcohol. Many of them can start realizing the talents which they never thought they had. Young people should be encouraged to become active citizens by way of attending to serious matters that build their communities instead of destroying them. This will increase their leadership skills and to become better persons. They can also form their own projects or an organization which focuses on helping others to empower themselves.

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