

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Prevalence and Correlates of Sexual abuse among Female Out-of-School Adolescents in Iwaya Community, Lagos State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study set out to document the prevalence and predictors of sexual intercourse with persons below the age of consent (statutory rape) and outright sex without consent (rape) among out-of-school adolescents in an urban slum in Lagos, Nigeria. Data gathered from a survey of 480 participants were employed. About 14% and 35% of the participants had been victims of rape and statutory rape respectively. Experience of rape was found to be a function of age and basic deprivation (Cox and Snell's  $R^2$  of 0.060 and a Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.108). Another model (with a Cox and Snell's  $R^2$  of 0.286 and a Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.394) shows that predictors of the experience of statutory rape include age, basic deprivation, living arrangement and previous attendance of school. In view of the overarching influence of basic deprivation on the experience of sexual abuse, an intervention programme that addresses the material conditions of adolescent girls in Nigeria is recommended. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2015; 19[1]: 82-90).

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**Key words:** Rape, statutory rape, basic deprivation, age of consent, adolescent girls, sexual abuse

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## Résumé

Cette étude visait à documenter la prévalence et les facteurs prédictifs de rapports sexuels avec des personnes au-dessous de l'âge du consentement (le viol selon la loi) et le sexe pur et simple sans consentement (le viol) chez les adolescents qui ne fréquentent pas l'école dans un bidonville à Lagos, au Nigeria. Les données recueillies à partir d'une enquête auprès de 480 participantes ont été employées. Environ 14% et 35% des participantes avaient été victimes du viol et de viol, respectivement. On a trouvé que le fait d'avoir été victime du viol était une fonction de l'âge et de la privation de base (Cox et  $R^2$  de Snell de 0,060 et  $R^2$  d'un Nagelkerke de 0,108). Un autre modèle (avec un Cox et  $R^2$  de Snell de 0,286 et  $R^2$  d'un Nagelkerke de 0,394) montre que les indices de l'expérience du viol comprennent l'âge, la privation de base, les conditions de logement et le fait d'avoir fréquenté une école auparavant. Compte tenu de l'influence globale de la privation de base sur l'expérience des sévices sexuels, un programme d'intervention qui répond aux conditions matérielles des adolescentes au Nigeria est recommandé. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2015; 19[1]: 82-90).

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**Mots-clés:** viol, viol, privation de base, l'âge du consentement, adolescentes, sévices sexuels

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## Introduction

Nonconsensual sex and other forms of sexual abuse are found in nearly all studied cultures of the world<sup>1</sup>. A nationally representative survey shows that about 6.6% of girls (15 – 19 years) had experienced sexual violence<sup>2</sup>. Rape is a form of sexual violence with severe reproductive health, social and psychological implications. It is “an anti-social act in which a person uses force to get a member of the opposite sex to submit to his or her sexual gratification”<sup>3, p18</sup>. Another form of abuse which often attracts very little attention from enforcers of the law on sexual abuse is statutory rape. Statutory rape refers to a situation where an

adult has sexual intercourse with a person who has not attained the statutory age of consent, albeit with the consent of the minor<sup>1</sup>.

The age of consent varies from country to country. In Chile, it is 14 years<sup>4</sup>. In some countries of the world, it also varies among states<sup>5</sup>. The idea behind statutory rape laws is that a person who has not reached the age of majority is legally incapable of consenting to sexual intercourse<sup>5</sup>. In Nigeria, the age of consent is 18 years. A severe penalty of life imprisonment is prescribed for perpetrators of rape. Yet, perpetrators of rape are hardly ever prosecuted and an atmosphere of impunity makes it a recurring event<sup>6</sup>. The Child Rights Act states in section 31 that “(1) No person shall have sexual

intercourse with a child.” In sub-section 3, it states that “Where a person is charged with an offence under this section, it is immaterial that: (a) the offender believed the person to be of or above the age of eighteen years; or (b) the sexual intercourse was with the consent of the child.” Yet, pedophiles are hardly ever brought to book<sup>6</sup>.

It is important to point out some of the negative effects of these forms of sexual abuse. Rape survivors experience rape trauma syndrome which is characterized by depression, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, self hatred, strained social relationships etc<sup>1,7</sup>. It can also lead to physical and sexual dysfunctions<sup>1</sup>. Other negative implications include increased rates of fatherlessness, teenage pregnancy, higher levels of welfare dependency and child poverty<sup>5</sup>. In cases where rape survivors become pregnant, they are faced with the challenge of deciding whether to keep the unborn child or opt for abortion. Obtaining abortion illegally may come at a cost and the only condition for obtaining an abortion legally in Nigeria is threat to the health of the mother. Survivors of rape who are students also stand the risk of having to discontinue their education if they become pregnant in spite of the fact that there is no educational policy in Nigeria that requires pregnant students to discontinue schooling. Often, stigmatization is responsible for the cessation of schooling. In addition, rape survivors may live with a stigma for the rest of their lives if the incidence is made public. This may also prevent survivors from seeking medical attention or legal redress. According to a recent study, sexual violence has been linked with sexually transmitted diseases and many raped women have HIV<sup>6</sup>. This underscores the negative reproductive health implications of sexual abuse and the need for greater scholarly interest in the subject matter.

Studies have documented the incidence sexual abuse among women in Nigeria. A study in North-Central Nigeria shows that the victims of sexual abuse in all of the cases studied are girls and the perpetrators are mostly men. The study further shows that about 99% of the cases involving children were cases of rape<sup>8</sup>. A similar study of hospital statistics in a state in South-West Nigeria shows that sexual assault cases account for two percent of female consultations outside obstetrics

and those affected the most are adolescents<sup>9</sup>. Another study<sup>10</sup> shows that 15% of secondary school girls and apprentices in the city of Ibadan, South-West Nigeria, had experienced rape. In yet another study, about nine percent of female respondents in a study had suffered at least one form of sexual abuse in the last five years preceding the study and about nineteen percent of them were raped<sup>11</sup>. According to a survey that cuts across four states in southern and northern Nigeria, about four percent of students at the basic level (i.e. first nine years of formal education) had experienced at least one form of sexual violence<sup>12</sup>. In another study, about 18% of the participants reported that they were raped at their first sexual encounters<sup>13</sup>. A recent study<sup>14</sup> also reveals that 70% of hawkers in a study in a South-eastern state in Nigeria had experienced at least one form of sexual abuse while hawking. About 28% of the hawkers who had experienced sexual intercourse reported that they had suffered rape while 56% of them had suffered statutory rape at the time of the study.

In other countries of the world, there are laws on statutory rape that seek to protect young people. In the US for instance, all the states have laws that prohibit sexual intercourse between adults and children younger than a certain age<sup>15</sup>. A prevalent form of statutory sexual relationship is the adolescent female/adult male sexual relationship<sup>16</sup>. A study in the US shows that the school is the most common location of peer sexual victimization<sup>17</sup>.

Some researchers have also investigated factors responsible for rape. Using a macro-analytic approach, a study<sup>18</sup> argued that patriarchy is a major socio-cultural factor that underlies the occurrence of rape in Nigeria. Yet it is clear that within the broad patriarchal social structure found in the Nigerian society, there are variations in incidence of rape across specific socio-demographic boundaries. The Demographic and Health survey shows for instance that sexual violence is higher among never-married women than it is among ever-married women. The experience of sexual violence is also lower among women with no education than among women who have been to school<sup>2</sup>. Yet, there remains a wide range of plausible predictors of experience of rape

that are yet to be explored by researchers. In addition, studies are yet to consider the prevalence of rape and statutory rape among out-of-school adolescents (defined as adolescents' ages 10 to 19 years, not registered in any formal school or for any examinations (such as the Senior Secondary Certificate examination or the Joint Matriculation examination) at the time of the study. These puzzles are the primary concerns of this study – to document attributes of out-of-school adolescent girls associated with the experience of rape and statutory rape.

## Methods

### *Participants*

For the purpose of this study, data from a survey of 480 out-of-school adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 years resident in Iwaya community, Lagos, Nigeria were used. About 88% of the participants had never been married nor ever lived with any man as though married while 12% were married or living together with men as though married or separated at the time of the study. Iwaya, the study location, is one of the largest slums with a high population of poor people in Lagos metropolis<sup>19</sup>. The community is located within the south-eastern part of Yaba, and it is bordered to the east by the Lagos lagoon. An estimated population of about 100,000 people are resident in the community. These people are drawn from different ethnic groups in Nigeria<sup>19</sup>. Iwaya community is one of the blighted areas of Lagos state and basic amenities like water and health care facilities are in short supply. A significant proportion of residents of the community live in squalor and a high level of material deprivation. The study location falls within the urban part of Lagos, which is in the South-West zone of the country.

The participants were selected through a census of all girls within the age bracket of 10 to 19 years who were out of school at the time of the study. The condition for exclusion was lack of willingness to participate in the study when the criteria of sex, age and schooling status were met. Informed consent was sought and obtained from all the respondents. In addition, parental approval was obtained before adolescents below the age of 18 years were interviewed.

### *Procedure*

A standardized interview schedule was administered to the participants. The instrument contains questions on respondents' background information, and several themes including education, parents' background characteristics, health, economic activities, sexual behaviour and knowledge/use of contraception, sexual abuse and perception of domestic violence. Each participant was engaged in a one-to-one interview by trained female field assistants. On the average, an interview was conducted in 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in local languages (mostly Yoruba) or pidgin English as considered suitable by the respondents. At the end of the field exercise, internal consistency checks were done on the administered instruments and poorly conducted interviews were screened.

### *Measures*

The dependent variable in this study is sexual abuse. Indicators of sexual abuse employed are rape and statutory rape. In order to measure rape, participants were asked if they had "ever been forced to have sex". This does not include those who had experienced attempted rape (three cases) and those who had been involved in transactional sex. The second indicator of sexual abuse was measured by sexual experience with an adult before the age of 18 years since the Child Rights' Act recognizes 18 years as the statutory age of consent in Nigeria. The independent variables in this study are age, attendance of school, migration status, basic deprivation, occupation, orphan status and living arrangement.

Age is measured using age as at last birthday in years. This was further categorized into younger and older adolescents using five-year intervals (10 – 14 years and 15 – 19 years). Migration status is measured in binary form, with those who were born within the community constituting a category and adolescent girls who migrated into the community constituting the other category. To measure attendance of school, two categories of those who had ever attended school and those who had never attended school were created. Basic deprivation was also measured at the binary level using the question on experience of hunger due to

lack of food. Those who said they sometimes “go hungry/without food” were categorized as suffering basic deprivation. Orphan status is measured at the binary level with those who had lost both or either of their parents constituting one category and those who had both parents alive constituting another category.

Living arrangement and occupation are also measured as categorical variables.

### ***Analysis***

Simple percentage analysis was adopted in the description of the background characteristics of participants, and their experience of rape/statutory rape. Tests are conducted at the bivariate level using the Chi square statistic while the logistic regression analysis was employed in examining the predictive power of the independent variables on experience of rape and statutory rape. Tests are considered significant only in cases where the p-value is less than 0.05 or at a higher level of significance.

### ***Ethical considerations***

The process of data collection in this study adhered to the ethical procedures of anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent. To ensure confidentiality, field assistants were trained to conduct interviews outside earshot of third parties. The activities and findings of the study were reported in a manner that ensured that the identities of the participants were not disclosed. The study design and research instrument were subjected to the approval of the ethical review committee of Action Health Incorporated which was composed of sociologists, gender researchers, and youth reproductive health researchers/practitioners.

## **Results**

### ***Background characteristics of respondents***

The study includes 480 out-of-school adolescents within the age bracket of 10 and 19 years. The respondents in early adolescence (10 – 14 years) account for 26% of the sample while those in late

adolescence (15 – 19 years) account for 74%. The mean and median ages of the participants are 16 and 17 years respectively. One out of every four of the respondents had never attended school. For more than half of the respondents, their reasons for not being in school at present are related to lack of the financial capacity to pursue formal education. Yoruba girls are in the majority in the sample, accounting for 42%. Next in size to this group are out-of-school Gun (a minority ethnic group) girls who account for 37% of the sample. Igbo and Hausa girls represent 17 and four percents respectively. About 76% of the respondents are Christians. About a tenth of the participants were either married or living with men as though married.

About 41% of the participants were involved in trading, while 29% were apprentices undergoing training in different crafts such as tailoring and hair-dressing. A little more than a fifth (21%) were not involved in any form of occupation at the time of the study while nine percent were involved in other economic activities such as working as sales girls. About 39% of the participants in the study migrated from different parts of the country and neighbouring Benin Republic. Four percent of the participants were living with their fathers while 20% lived with their mothers only. Thirty-nine percent of the participants were resident with both parents while eight percent lived with their boyfriends/husbands. A little less than 30% of the respondents lived with other people such as relatives, craft-masters/mistresses and female friends. The mean household size for the sample is 5.73.

Twenty-two percent of the respondents had lost at least one of their biological parents at the time of the study. About 90% of the participants had living biological mothers, 85% had living biological fathers while 78% had both parents alive. Using staying without food for lack of provision as an indicator of basic deprivation, 58% of the participants had suffered basic deprivation. About 42% of the participants had ever had sexual intercourse. The mean age at onset of sex is 15.7 years while the median age is 16 years. The majority of the respondents had their sexual debut at the age of 15 years. About a third (33%) of those who had initiated sexual intercourse at the

time of the study (and 14% of the entire sample) had suffered rape. About 35% of the participants had suffered statutory rape. This represents more than 81% of the participants who had experienced sexual intercourse.

### Correlates of rape

As anticipated, there is a significant association between age and experience of rape. While less than three percent of adolescents within the age group of 10 to 14 years reported that they had ever been raped, 18% of those within the age group of 15 to 19 years reported that they had ever been raped (See Table 1). A greater likelihood of ever

being raped was also found among those who had ever attended school (with 17% reporting experience of rape). On the other hand, only 6 percent of the respondents who had never attended school reported that they had ever been raped. Table 1 shows that there is no significant association between experience of rape and migration status, living arrangement, orphan status and occupation but there is a significant association with basic deprivation. A greater proportion (18%) of those who said they sometimes go hungry for lack of food had been raped in comparison with nine percent of those who do not go hungry for lack of food.

**Table 1:** Prevalence of sexual abuse (percent) by background characteristics

Independent variables		Victims of rape (n = 67)	Victims of statutory rape (n = 166)
Age <sup>a,b</sup>	10 – 14 years (n = 124)	2.4	4.8
	15 – 19 years (n = 356)	18.0	44.9
	$\chi^2$ (df)	18.536 (1)	65.384 (1)
Migration status	Non-migrants (n = 295)	12.9	34.6
	Migrants (n = 185)	15.7	34.6
	$\chi^2$ (df)	0.739 (1)	.000 (1)
Ever attended school <sup>a,b</sup>	Yes (n = 359)	16.7	39.8
	No (n = 121)	5.8	19.8
	$\chi^2$ (df)	8.999 (1)	15.555 (1)
Living arrangement <sup>b</sup>	Father alone (n = 17)	35.3	41.2
	Mother alone (n = 94)	10.6	35.1
	Both parents (n = 188)	12.2	25.0
	Boyfriend/husband (n = 40)	10.0	95.0
	Others (n = 141)	17.0	29.1
	$\chi^2$ (df)	10.658 (5)	75.901 (5)
Orphan status <sup>b</sup>	Either or both parents are dead (n = 104)	15.4	44.2
	Both parents alive (n = 376)	13.6	31.9
	$\chi^2$ (df)	.225 (1)	5.462 (1)
Occupation <sup>a,b</sup>	Apprentice (n = 138)	21.7	49.3
	Trader (n = 197)	9.6	28.4
	Nothing (n = 101)	12.9	34.7
	Others (n = 44)	11.4	15.9
	$\chi^2$ (df)	10.355 (3)	23.251 (3)
Basic deprivation (Do you sometimes go hungry?) <sup>a,b</sup>	Yes (n = 278)	17.6	40.6
	No (n = 202)	8.9	26.2
	$\chi^2$ (df)	7.399 (1)	10.738 (1)
All participants		14.0	34.6

a : Variable is significantly associated with experience of rape ( $P < 0.05$ );

b : Variable is significantly associated with experience of statutory rape ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2:** Logistic regression model for experience of rape

	Predictor	Coefficient (B)	S.E	Odds ratio (Exp (B))
Age	10-14 years (reference category)	-	-	1.0
	15 – 19 years	1.050	0.301	2.857***
Basic deprivation	Sometimes go hungry	-	-	1.0
	Never go hungry	- 0.327	0.149	0.721*
	Constant	- 2.677	0.305	0.069***
Model Chi square = 29.525; df=2 (P-value < 0.001) Hosmer and Lemeshow's chi-square test = 1.185 (P=0.553)				

\*: P < 0.05; \*\* : P < 0.01; \*\*\*: P < 0.001

**Table 3:** Logistic regression model for experience of statutory rape

	Predictor	Coefficient (B)	S.E	Odds ratio (Exp (B))
Age	10-14 years (ref. category)	-	-	1.0
	15 – 19 years	1.137	0.225	3.117***
Attendance of school	Ever attended school	-	-	1.0
	Never attended school	- 0.594	0.185	0.552**
Basic deprivation	Sometimes go hungry	-	-	1.0
	Never go hungry	- 0.314	0.121	0.731*
Living arrangement	With father alone	-	-	1.0
	With mother alone	- 0.655	0.276	0.519*
	With both parents	- 1.062	0.248	0.346***
	With husband/boyfriend	3.298	0.655	27.059***
	With others	-0.969	0.261	0.379***
	Constant	- 1.216	0.288	0.296***
Model Chi square = 161.395; df=7 (P-value < 0.001) Hosmer and Lemeshow's chi-square test = 7.444 (P=0.384)				

\*: P < 0.05; \*\* : P < 0.01; \*\*\*: P < 0.001

When the effect of age is controlled, there is insufficient proof that basic deprivation is a predictor of rape among adolescents within the age bracket of 10 – 14 years. Among adolescents within the age bracket of 15 – 19 years, however, it remains a predictor of rape. On the whole, age and basic deprivation are significantly associated with the experience of rape. Put differently older adolescents who suffer basic deprivation are the most vulnerable to rape (See Table 2).

### **Correlates of statutory rape**

The study records an association between age and experience of statutory rape. As shown in Table 1, 45% of adolescents within the age bracket of 15 – 19 years had suffered statutory rape. Among younger adolescents, however, only about five percent had suffered statutory rape. Table 1 further shows that attendance of school is associated with statutory rape, with a higher proportion (40%) of participants who had ever attended school

reporting that they had been victims of statutory rape. Out-of-school adolescents living with their boyfriends/husbands recorded the highest rate of experience of statutory rape. While 95% of girls of this category reported experience of statutory rape, only 25% and 29% of those living with both parents and those living with other relatives had experienced statutory rape. A little above 41% of those living with their fathers, and 35% of those living with their mothers had experienced statutory rape.

While 44% of those who had either or both of their parents dead reported experience of statutory rape, just about 32% of those who had both parents living had experienced statutory rape. Basic deprivation was also found to be associated with statutory rape. Out-of-school girls who said they sometimes lack food and go hungry reported a higher rate of experience of statutory rape than those who do not go hungry.

The logistic regression model in Table 3 shows that living arrangement, basic deprivation,

attendance of school and age are predictors of experience of statutory rape. Out-of-school adolescents living with their boyfriends/husbands are 27 times more likely to have experienced statutory rape than those who live with their fathers, while those living with mothers, both parents and other relatives are less likely to have experienced statutory rape than those living with fathers.

Furthermore, out-of-school adolescents who do not experience basic deprivation are less likely to experience statutory rape just as those who never attended school are less likely to experience statutory rape than those who had ever attended school. The study also shows that those within the age bracket of 15 – 19 years are three times more likely to experience statutory rape than younger adolescents.

## Discussion

In line with earlier studies<sup>5,9,10,13</sup>, this study has shown that a significant proportion of adolescent girls in Nigeria have experienced at least one form of sexual abuse just as adolescents in other parts of the world<sup>4,5,20</sup>. In addition, this study has documented a higher prevalence of sexual abuse among out-of-school girls than among the general population of girls within the same age range in Nigeria. While the Nigerian Demographic Health Survey documented a 6.6% prevalence rate of experience of sexual violence among girls (ages 15 -19 years)<sup>2</sup>, this study shows that about 18% of out-of-school adolescent girls in the study population had experienced forced sex. In addition, about 45% of these girls had experienced statutory rape. These observations suggest that out-of-school girls might run a greater risk of being sexually abused than other members of the society. A striking observation from this study is the association between basic deprivation and the different forms of sexual abuse. Irrespective of age which is a common confounding variable in matters of sexuality, basic deprivation stands as a predictor of sexual abuse. Adolescent girls who sometimes go without food were found to be more likely to have experienced rape or statutory rape. Interestingly, basic deprivation happens to be the only significant predictor of experience of rape

with the exception of age. Researchers from other climes have observed that adult men are more likely than adolescents to have jobs, cars and money to spend. These may appeal to adolescent girls with disadvantaged background. Relationships between adolescent girls and adult men may therefore not cease until adolescent girls have access to good schools and jobs and see a future for themselves<sup>20</sup>.

Naturally, the likelihood of experience of rape increases with age. Apart from age and basic deprivation, the experience of rape cuts across the lines of migration status, orphan status, living arrangement, attendance of school. An explanation for this observation is that deprived adolescents, in their search for means of survival, may find themselves in compromising circumstances and at the mercy of potential abusers who take advantage of them. In the same vein, deprived adolescents are more likely to experience statutory rape as they are at greater odds of seeking their means of survival from predatory men.

Statutory rape was found to be a more discriminatory experience than forced sexual intercourse, with attendance of school and living arrangement playing a significant role in predicting the experience in addition to age and basic deprivation. As expected, older girls and deprived girls are more likely to experience statutory rape than younger girls and those whose basic needs are usually met. The study further shows that out-of-school adolescent girls who live with both parents are the least likely to experience statutory rape. These girls are about three times less likely to experience statutory rape than those who live with their fathers only. On the other hand those who live with their boyfriends/sexual partners/husbands run the greatest risk of experiencing statutory rape. It remains yet unclear why girls who had ever attended school are at greater odds of experiencing statutory rape than those who had never been to school. There is agreement between this finding and the findings of the NDHS<sup>2</sup>. A possible explanation is that those who had ever been to school have had greater interaction with men since going to and returning from school offers the opportunity to be away from adult supervision. Therefore, such girls may meet their sexual partners either on their way to

school or from school. Those who had never been to school on the other hand may not have a reason good enough to be away from home.

## Conclusion

The study has shown that the likelihood of experience of rape increases with age and the occurrence of basic deprivation while predictors of experience of statutory rape include age, having never attended school, basic deprivation and living arrangements. Sexual abuse comes with negative reproductive health implications<sup>6</sup>, as well as psychological and social consequences<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is important to carefully address the factors that heighten the risk of sexual abuse. From this study, two major factors that expose young girls to sexual abuse are basic deprivation and living arrangement. Non-governmental organizations working in the area of adolescent sexuality should seek to address the problem of basic deprivation among girls through intervention programmes aimed at empowering out-of-school adolescent girls. In addition, men who “accommodate” young girls below the statutory age of consent in the name of marriage, cohabitation or any other nomenclature should be prosecuted in line with the Child Rights Act. Divorce and separation should be discouraged as this study has shown that they are contributory factors to young girls’ vulnerability to sexual abuse. As shown earlier, the girls with the least likelihood of being sexually active are those who live with both parents. Therefore, all other living arrangements such as living with the father only, mother only or with a boyfriend/husband before the age of 18 years should be discouraged.

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## Contribution of authors

Michael Kunnuji conceived this study, took part in designing the study, supervised the collection of data analysed the data and prepared the manuscript.

Adenike Esiet took part in the collection of the data, facilitated securing permission to use the data and contributed to the preparation of the manuscript.

All authors mentioned in the article approved the manuscript.

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