

A STUDY OF CERTAIN SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH SCHOOL HABITUAL TRUANTS

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation is aimed at comparing the two groups of student i.e. habitual truants and regulars on the variable of socio-economic status, level of aspiration, achievement, test anxiety and non-verbal intelligence. Needless to mention that our children are greatest national resource, on whom depends the future growth and prosperity of our nation. However, there are number of problems faced by our educational system especially at the secondary level. Among them one is the problem of delinquency. There is sufficient evidence that juvenile delinquency is increasing at a very rate in modern society both in term of absolute number of offences committed and in terms of rate of delinquent behavior. Daily in news papers are reported cases of delinquent of different types. This increasing trend in the percentage of delinquent behavior has become the concern of all who are associated with the social and economic welfare of the society. The sample for the present study was drawn form ten High and Senior Secondary Schools of district Hamirpur of Himachal Pradesh. The selection of schools was made randomly. A sample of 100 students studying in classes IX and X consisting of 50 habitual truants and 50 regulars was selected for the study.

INTRODUCTION

“Education” writes Dr. F.W. Thomas (1891) “is no exotic in India”. There is no Country where the love of learning had so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and powerful an influence” (p. 1). No doubt countries like China, Egypt and Babylonia rank with India as being the cradles of ancient civilizations, but no other country has left behind such enduring marks of heritage as India. Her art and literature, which survive to the present day, bear eloquent testimony to her cultural institutions of ancient days. These institutions with the hallmark of the hoary past have lived through the age on account of their system of education which is acknowledged to be extraordinary sound.

Real education is primarily a process of training of the hand, head and heart in the art of living a happy, corporate life. Its objective is the full development of the individual as a useful member of society, and thus make him capable of fighting against of tyranny and injustice imposed upon

him by nature and society as impediments to such development. No education is worth the name which does not inculcate the spirit of social service, self-sacrifice and self-reliance, the qualities that are essential for living cooperatively and harmoniously.

Today with the massive increase in education unemployment, a vocation bias has to be given to the educational system. As the Kothari commission (1964-1966, p. 80) observed:

“A programme which can bring education into closer relationship with productivity is to give a strong vocational bias to secondary education and to increase the emphasis on agriculture and technological education at the university stage. This is of special significance where, as we have pointed out, the educational system has been for training young men so for mostly for government service and so-called white collar profession”.

The Nation, at this crucial juncture, must restructure the education system integrating it with socially useful productive work.

The Gandhian ideal of education, that is, education in the fullest sense of the term has great relevance today which cannot be denied. His concept of Nai Talim (new education) has to be experimented with, at such a critical juncture, when the British education system has virtually failed to make the individual socially conscious and useful and to build up to the national character.

At first, only primary and elementary schools were necessary, especially for the masses, who needed only the fundamental principles of reading, writing and arithmetic. Secondary education and institution of higher learning for training of leaders came up later.

The objective of pre-primary education may be broadly defined as the provision of experiences and the proper environmental condition which will promote the physical, mental, emotional and social growth of children between the ages of three to six.

Primary schools provide for universal education which is fundamentally a democratic conception. That is why Fascism could never tolerate this idea. Kilpatrick (1963) has cited flitter who is reported to have said “Universal education is most corroding and disintegrating poison that liberalism ever invented for its own destruction. We must, therefore, be consistent and allow the great mass of the lowest order the blessings of illiteracy” (p. 5).

Secondary education stresses the need for varying educational courses to suit different attitudes and to enable the large majority of persons to fit into some vocation after completing their school career. A large number of multipurpose high schools are, therefore, needed. In these, encouragement may be given, in particular, to agriculture and allied activities and to cottage and small scale industries.

The aim of secondary education as such is both culture and utilitarian. It should also be appreciated that secondary education determines the quality of a nation's citizen, since it deals with children between ages 11 and 17 or 18 which is the most precious period in the individual's life, having greatest psychological and physiological significance. Our secondary schools should, therefore, help the youth to build up their physique and to develop their intellectual and practical powers according to their ability and special attitudes. It should further help them to increase their practical and vocational efficiency so that they may be able not only to stand on their own legs at the end of their educational career but may also be able to play their part effectively in building up the economic prosperity of the country.

It is recommended that in the upper classes of high schools there be two divisions—one leading to the Entrance Examination of Universities, the other of a more practical character, intended to fit youths for commercial or other non-literary pursuits.

THE PROBLEM

The indictment of many schools as delinquency producing institutions seems to centre on two types of accusations: (i) that the schools have failed as socialization institutions— that delinquency is produced because young people have not been taught the social skills that enable them to interact appropriately with peers and adults; or (ii) that failure in academic subjects leads to situations in which youths are shamed or downgraded by peers and teachers, or in which they develop such negative self images that they undertake the alternative of delinquent behaviour as a defense mechanism or a method of gaining attention or status.

It is not a simple matter to pinpoint those factors within the realm of the school which help to cause juvenile delinquency. Although their actions often belie it, educators are generally cognizant of the fact that the elements which contribute to any one case of delinquency are numerous and varied. As the schools, in periodical revisions of the curriculums, began to focus attention on the individual, some educators became aware of this fact and attempted to uncover ways in which the schools contribute to the problem of juvenile delinquency. It is difficult to stipulate, with any degree of certainty, that a particular condition or circumstance in the school contributes to the problem. In many instances, according to Sullinger (1929) "the determiners of delinquency in the schools are acts of omission rather than of commission".

Smith (1958) lists twenty seven conditions which he believes are among those factors which bring about conditions contributing to delinquency either directly or indirectly. A great many of these are conditions which well-informed educators have been militating against for years. These include:

- i) Lack of trained teachers
- ii) Poor school facilities
- iii) Lack of consideration for individual needs
- iv) Pupil discrimination
- v) Lack of concern for leisure time pursuits
- vi) Inadequate counseling and guidance services
- vii) Lack of needed specialization personnel.

There is no agreement as to how significant these factors are. The jurists, the sociologists, the psychologists, and the psychiatrists have widely divergent approaches to the issue of delinquency (Ausubel, 1954). The jurist is concerned with the ability of the individual to know right from wrong and to appreciate the nature and quality of his act, while the sociologists puts the greatest weight upon social disorganization and condition of socio-economic deprivation. The psychologist and psychiatrist tend to consider delinquency a problem of disordered personality development arising from unfortunate relations between the child and significant persons in his psychological field rather than to consider a manifestation of disturbance in grosser patterns of social organisation (Ausubel, 1954). Appreciating the existence of these divergent beliefs, the educator may find it difficult to decide for himself which are the most important factors. Rather than to pretend to be able to do so, he may take a positive approach and attempt to ameliorate all which might tend to cause problems.

There are number of signals which can serve to warn the school that a child may become a juvenile delinquent. the importance of these early signs may be appreciated when one reads such statements as that of the superintendent of schools who suggested that the public schools had a record on the guilty youth which could have predicted the crime for practically every major crime case in his local (Fine, 1959). These signs generally include school absenteeism, academic failure, behavioural problems, dropouts, school phobia or/and truancy.

These days the truant is distinguished from the school phobic, although the distinction is not always a clear cut one. The truant or habitual absentee is a child who absents himself from school without a legitimate cause and without the permission. The chief concern with habitual absenteeism is that it is frequently a forerunner of delinquency. Shulman (1961) suggests that most habitual absentees do not become delinquent, although studies indicate that severe delinquency is usually preceded by chronic truancy (Robison, 1960; Abrahamsen, 1960).

Generally the important thing is not the length or continuity of absences, but rather the causes. Several suggested that a legitimate cause for absence in their rural community is the fact that the child is needed at home to help with farm work. The question was raised as to how different this type of case is from that in which the child in the urban centre is kept home to take care of younger children while both parents go to work. In a 1930 study Robison (1960) reported that only about one third of 20,000 of the absences were willful truancy. More recently it has been

reported that nearly 80 per cent of the cases of absenteeism are due to legitimate reasons (Culbertson, 1960).

Studies of truants show that, as a group, they have more personal and family problems than do other children. Neumeier (1961) reports two studies that help bear this out. Abrahamsen (1960) suggests that, with 60 per cent of all offenders starting their criminal careers as truants, it is essential that truancy be investigated as to its start, its frequency and its relation to the offender's home and school atmosphere, to the possible influence of his companions and to his parents' reactions. Some schools attempt to do this, but Cavan (1955) believes that the occasional truant is tracked and punished for his actions with no attempt to understand why he does not want to go to school. The occasional as well as the habitual truant may need special attention. If a child has problems related only to the school, would he become a truant? One study concludes that most children will go to school when they are well and when their parents want them to go and cooperate in assuring attendance.

A National survey conducted in the U.K. in 1974 found 2 per cent of the Secondary School students to be absent without legitimate reason, compared with 8 per cent absent through ill health. Absences over a 7 week period in Sheffield's 20 comprehensives and their feeder primaries have been analysed to see what light they shed on the dimensions and possible causes of the truancy problem. Up to the age of 12, no matter whether the child was in a junior or middle school or the first year of a comprehensive, persistent absenteeism (defined as missing half or more of all possible attendances without reasons) never exceeded one per cent. Comprehensive 12 years old had a rate of 0.5 per cent. But the rate steadily rose after that to 1.3 per cent at the age of 13, 1.4 per cent at the age of 14, 2.3 per cent at the age of 15 and 4.4 per cent at the age of 16. In four comprehensives, over 10 per cent of the 16 years olds were persistent absentees (Galloway, 1976).

Fogelman and Richardson (1974) in an investigation of 16,000 children born in one week in March 1958 also found that 1.2 per cent of their sample had truanted at sometime, or were suspected of truancy. Percentages varied according to area, type of school, age of children studied and many other factors. There are, in fact, many practical difficulties in ascertaining accurately the number of children truanting on a particular day. Although registers are kept in most schools, it is often the case that children (especially in large secondary schools where there is frequent movement and sometimes unsupervised private study periods) will leave school after registration or half way through the day. Some teachers may also turn a blind when a particularly disruptive member of the class is truanting, and parents may write notes to cover unlawful absence, again preventing detection.

Many other researchers have suggested that there is a link of some significance between truancy and delinquency. As Kahm and Hursten (1964) point out, truancy almost inevitably leads to antisocial behaviour, e.g., lying becomes necessary to avoid detection and also there are dangers

associated with amount of unoccupied time when the child should have been at school. Tyerman studied the records of 137 pupils whose parents were prosecuted for the child's truancy and 64 of these children had police records by the end of year. Also, when truants general clinic cases were compared, a correlation of 0.59 between truancy and stealing was obtained. Again, in a study by Glueck and Glueck (1950) the proportion of delinquent children with records of truancy was found to be 95 per cent. Truants are characteristically be set by problems such as enuresis (bed wetting), lying, wandering from home, stealing, and aggression.

Truancy appears to have a number of causes. Some children are truant simply to demonstrate their independence of, or resistance to, adult authority. Other children are truants because they have adopted parents. This is particularly found in some lower socio-economic families where parents keep the children home to look after younger ones, to help with household chores, and so on. This is an important consideration in assessing the meaning of truanting behaviour of individual children. Although truancy is often regarded as maladjusted behaviour, there is a form of truant which is a social norm for the group from which the truant comes. School attendance may actually represent a departure from the normal behaviour pattern of such a group, as it is regarded as neither necessary nor desirable. Such an attitude may not indicate any personal maladjustment or inadequacy, but is a reflection of the mores of a particular sub-culture.

What did tally with absenteeism, very strikingly, was the proportion of children in the school receiving free school meals. As this rose, so did the absence rate, with hardly any variation. When Galloway checked back he found that the primary schools from which these children had come also had high proportions receiving school meals and a high absenteeism rate (by primary standards).

But further investigation, with the aid of the Education Welfare officers, revealed that very little of this absenteeism could really be called truancy. About 11 per cent of the absentees were skipping school because they were bored and a further 4 per cent were genuine 'school phobics' yet just under a quarter were at home with their parents' approval, and in just over a quarter of the cases the parents did not mind what the children did. It was convenient, it seemed, to have an able bodied son or daughter around.

The raising of the school leaving age, still much resented in many working class households, undoubtedly contribute to this reaction. But a quarter of the primary school parents whose children were persistent absentees were just as happy to have them at home. The problems may be smaller than is often imagined, comments Galloway, but it is also a great deal more complex.

In the 1920,s students of delinquency and crime became interested in truancy. There has been a considered casual factor (Heumeyer, 1961). Nor have there been any studied which give evidence of the casual relationship between truancy and subsequent other types of delinquency (Robison, 1960).

From the perusal of these studies, it is evident that only a few researches have been conducted on the aspect of truancy. Moreover, most of the studies have been conducted in the foreign social settings and therefore, the results of these studies cannot be applied in toto in the Indian settings. In India no significant study has been conducted on this aspect. Taking into consideration these facts, the investigator selected the following problems for study:

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were laid down for the present study:

1. To study the Socio-Economic Status of Habitual Truants and Regulars.
2. To study the Level of Aspiration of Habitual Truants and Regulars.
3. To study the Level Achievement Motivation of Habitual truants and Regulars.
4. To study the Level of Test Anxiety of Habitual Truants and Regulars.
5. To study the Non- Verbal Intelligence of Habitual Truants and Regulars.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The hypotheses formulated and tested in the present study are as under:

1. The habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on socio-economic status.
2. The habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Level of Aspiration.
3. The habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Achievement Motivation.
4. The habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Test Anxiety.
5. The habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Non-Verbal Intelligence.

METHOD

The present piece of research is of survey type. Survey research studies large and small populations by selecting and studying samples chosen from the populations to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of sociological and psychological variables. Surveys covered by this definition are often called sample surveys, probably because survey

research is developed as a separate research activity, along with the development and improvement of sampling procedures. From these samples the characteristics of the defined population or universe are inferred.

SAMPLING

The sample for the present study was drawn from ten High and Senior Secondary Schools of district Hamirpur of Himachal Pradesh. The selection of schools was made randomly. A sample of 100 students studying in classes IX and X consisting of 50 habitual truants and 50 regulars was selected for the study.

The identification of habitual truants was made on the basis of following criteria:

- i) Who remains absent without leave for three consecutive days and repeats this performance at least twice a month.
- ii) Who skips from school after recess without taking leave and repeats this performance at least thrice a month.
- iii) Who skips from specific periods without informing the concerned teacher and repeats this performance at least thrice a month.

Also 50 regular students were selected randomly from these schools. A student was considered to be a regular if he had at least 90 percent attendance for the last six months.

TOOLS USED

As the present study was concerned with comparing the two groups of students habitual truants and regulars on certain socio-psychological characteristics i.e. socio economic status, level of aspiration, achievement motivation, test anxiety and non verbal intelligence the following tools were employed for the purpose of collecting data:

Socio-Economic Status: Socio-economic status scale questionnaire (English Version) developed by Koul (1985) was employed to assess the socio-economic status of the school going children of Himachal Pradesh. There are 14 items in the scale which cover Family Background, Material Possessions, and Certain Socio-psychological –Indicators.

Test of Level of Aspiration: In order to measure the level of aspiration of the students of three treatment groups, the Test of Level of Aspiration by Shah and Bhargave (n.d.) was used in the present study.

Achievement Motivation Inventory: In order to measure the level of achievement motivation of the students, the inventory of Achievement Motivation by Prayag Mehta was used in the present study. This inventory contains 22 items.

Test Anxiety: For the measurement of Test Anxiety Hindi Version of Sarason's Test Anxiety Questionnaire was selected. This scale focuses on a specific anxiety i.e. test anxiety. The test consists of 30 items. The original test was prepared by Sarason et. al. (1960). Nijhawan prepared Hindi and Punjabi versions of TASC in 1972, standardized by Sarason et. al. (1960).

Standard Progressive Matrices: For measuring non-verbal intelligence of the students taken for the study. A standard Progressive matrix developed by Raven, Court, and Raven (1977) was used in the present study.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Since the present piece of work was concerned with comparing the habitual truants and regulars on certain socio-psychological characteristics, the technique of t-test was used to serve this purpose. The comparisons of two groups of student i.e. habitual truants and regular for the variables of socio-economic status, level of aspiration, achievement motivation, test anxiety and non-verbal intelligence are given as under.

Socio-Economic Status: The values of means, standard deviations, standard error of means and the standard error of difference between the means of the two groups of student i.e. habitual truants and regulars along with the critical ratio on the score of socio-economic status are given in Table 3.1

The means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), Standard Error of Means (SE_M) and the Standard Error of Difference between the Means (SE_D), along with Critical Ratio (CR) on the Scores of Socio-Economic Status for Habitual Truants and Regulars

Group	M	SD	SE_M	SE_D	CR	Level of Significance
Habitual Truants	76.30	12.58	2.16	3.59	3.39	Significant at 0.01 Level
Regulars	90.66	20.80	3.29			

It is evident from Table 3.1 that the value of CR for the two groups of student i.e. habitual truants and regulars came out to be 3.39 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. This shows that the two groups under study differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on socio-economic status. Since the mean score of a regular (90.66) is higher than the mean score for habitual truants (76.30), it may be interpreted that the regulars come from families having higher socio-economic status as compared to the habitual truants. Thus the hypothesis that the habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on socio-economic status is rejected.

LEVEL OF ASPIRATION

The values of means, standard deviations, standard error of means and the standard error of difference between the means of the two groups of student i.e. habitual truants and regulars along with critical ratio on the scores of level of aspiration are given in Table 3.2.

The Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), Standard Error of Means (SE_M) and the Standard Error of Difference between the Means (SE_D) along with Critical Ratio (CR) on the Scores of Level of Aspiration (NTR) for habitual Truants and Regulars

Group	M	SD	SE_M	SE_D	CR	Level of Significance
Habitual Truants	4.2	1.40	0.31	0.91	0.23	Not significant at 0.01 level
Regulars	4.6	1.66	0.63			

It is

evident from Table 3.2 that the value of CR for the two groups of student's i.e. habitual truants and regulars came out to be 0.23 which is not significant at 0.01 level of confidence. This shows that the two groups under study do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Level of Aspiration. It is, therefore, interpreted that habitual truants and regulars exhibit more or less equal level of aspiration and whatsoever differences appear in their means may be attributed to sampling fluctuations. Thus the hypothesis that the habitual truants and regulars don't differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Level of Aspiration is retained.

ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION

The values of means, Standard deviations, standard error of difference between the means of the two groups of student i.e. habitual truants regulars along with the critical ration on the scores of achievement motivation are given in Table 3.3.

The Mean (M), Standard Deviations (SD), Standard Errors of Means (SE_M) and the Standard Error of Difference between the Means (SE_D) along with Critical Ration (CR) on the Scores of Achievement Motivation for Habitual Truants and Regulars

Group	M	SD	SE_M	SE_D	CR	Level of Significance
Habitual Truants	12.05	2.54	1.21	1.73	1.60	Not significant at 0.01 level
Regulars	13.28	2.70	1.23			

It is evident from Table 3.2 that the value of CR for the tow groups of students i.e. habitual truants and regulars came out to be 1.60 which is not significant at 0.01 level of confidence. This shows that the two groups under study do not differ significantly from each other with respect to

their means scores on Achievement Motivation. It is , therefore, interpreted that habitual truants and regulars exhibit more or less equal level of achievement motivation and whatsoever differences appear in their means may be attributed to sampling fluctuations. Thus the hypothesis that the habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly form each other with respect to their mean scores on Achievement Motivation is retained.

TEST ANXIETY

The values of means, standard deviations, standard error of means and the standard error of difference between the means of the tow groups of student i.e. habitual truants and regulars along with the critical ratio on the scores of test anxiety are given in Table 3.4.

The Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), Standard Error of Means (SE_M) and the Standard Error of Difference between the Means (SE_D) of Habitual Truants and Regulars along with critical Ration (CR) on the scores of Test Anxiety

Group	M	SD	SE_M	SE_D	CR	Level of Significance
Habitual Truants	19.80	4.18	2.13	5.05	3.48	Significant at 0.01 level
Regulars	14.80	3.22	3.42			

It is evident from Table 3.4 that the value of CR for the two groups of student i.e. habitual truants and Regulars came out to be 3.48 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. This shows that the two groups under study differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Test Anxiety. Since the mean score of habitual truants (19.80) is higher than the mean score for regulars (14.80), it may be interpreted that the habitual truants exhibit significantly highly level of test anxiety as compared to the regulars. Thus the hypothesis that the habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on test anxiety is rejected.

NON-VERBAL INTELLIGENCE

The values of means, standard deviations, standard error of means and the standard error of difference between the two groups of students i.e. habitual truants and regulars along with the critical ration on the scores of non-verbal intelligence are given in Table 3.5.

Group	M	SD	SE_M	SE_D	CR	Level of Significance
Habitual Truants	31.98	8.17	1.33	1.95	4.41	Significant at 0.01 level
Regulars	39.10	9.65	1.38			

It is

evident form table 3.5 that the value of CR for the two groups of student i.e. habitual truants and

regulars came out to be 4.41 which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence. This shows that the two groups under study differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Non- Verbal Intelligence. Since the mean score for regulars (39.10) is higher than the mean score for habitual truants (31.98), it may be interpreted that the regulars possess higher level of non – Verbal Intelligence as compared to the habitual truants. Thus the hypothesis that the habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly from each other with respect to their mean scores on Non –Verbal intelligence is rejected.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the analysis and interpretations of data, the following conclusions are laid down:

1. The regulars come from families having higher socio-economic status as compared to the habitual truants.
2. The habitual truants and regulars exhibit more or less equal level of aspiration.
3. The habitual truants and regulars exhibit more or less equal level of achievement motivation.
4. The habitual truants exhibit significantly high level of test anxiety as compared to the regulars.
5. The regulars possess higher level of Non- Verbal Intelligence as compared to the habitual truants.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study indicate that habitual truants and regulars do not differ significantly on the variables of Level of Aspiration and Achievement Motivation. However, the two groups of students differ significantly on the variables of Socio-Economic Status, Test Anxiety and Non –Verbal Intelligence. The study reveals that habitual truants come from poor families, Exhibit higher level of test anxiety and possess lower non-verbal intelligence.

The children coming from poor socio-economic status families don't enjoy the proper educational facilities like books, note books and stationery etc. Also, the home environment of such children is not very conducive for study. Most of such children have to help their parents at home and earn money. As a result, such children tend to be habitual truants. If poor students are provided with free text books and other teaching learning material including free mid-day meals and stipends, they can be made interested in school and study thereby helping them to be regular in school.

The schools usually do not cater to the specific needs of students having lower intelligence. As a result, such students become backward in their studies and start skipping school and consequently turn to be habitual truants. The only way to solve this problem is to make the teaching learning

process suitable for such children. Such students may be treated special cases and be given individual attention by the teacher. Low socio-economic status, lower intelligence, poor teaching methods, non conducive school environment and lower academic achievement tends to develop higher level of test anxiety among the students and thereby further affecting their level of academic achievement. This may result in making such students habitual truants. Again the suggestions forwarded earlier may help to reduce test anxiety and eradicate the problem of truancy among children.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

On the basis of experience gained while conducting the present piece of research. The following suggestions are made for further research in this area:

1. Similar study may be conducted on a larger sample to arrive at more reliable and valid conclusion.
2. Similar study may be conducted involving some other socio-psychological variables.
3. A comparative study of boy and girl habitual truants may be conducted with respect to incidence and causes of truancy.
4. Some case studies of habitual truants may be undertaken to have an in-depth understanding of the problem.

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