

Impact of Gender on Work Stress Among Academic Administrators

¹Patience Okwudili Nwosu, ²Eucharia Nchedo Aye, ²Celestine Okwudili Eze, ²Ngozi Edith Ekesionye, ³Ifeanyi E. Iwundu, ⁴Grace Ogechukwu Ugwonna, ³Matthew Ikechukwu Eze and ^{2,3}Nkiruka Christiana Ohia

¹*Department of Educational Foundations, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria*

²*Department of Educational Foundations,*

³*Institute of African Studies,*

⁴*Department of Social Science Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria*

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Abstract: This study investigated the impact of gender on work stress among academic administrators in universities in South-East, Nigeria. One research question and one null hypothesis guided the study. The design adopted was a descriptive survey. The population of the study consisted of 786 universities academic administrators from both federal and state universities in the study area. The study sampled the whole population because of its manageable size. The Work Stress of Academic Administrators Questionnaire (WSAAQ) which consists of thirty items enabled the researchers to gather data for the study. The WSAAQ has four-point rating scale ranging from strongly agreed (4 point) to strongly disagreed (1 point) with Cronbach alpha of 0.90. The WSAAQ was validated by three experts. The research question and hypothesis were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test, respectively. The finding of the study revealed that there was no significant between male and female university academic administrators on work stress experience in terms of job performance. The government should employ both male and female at an equal rate without bias of any kind.

Corresponding Author:

Nkiruka Christiana Ohia

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

In institution or organization, people behave differently, especially when rated based on gender. Gender is the social and historical constructs for masculine and feminine roles, behaviours, attributes and ideologies which connote some notion of biological sex^[1]. Pollard and Morgan^[2] saw gender as a socially constructed expectation for male and female behaviour

which prescribe division of labour and responsibilities between males and females and which grants different rights and obligations to them. McKay^[3] refers to gender as the sum of cultural values, attitudes, roles, practices and characteristics based on sex. Akper *et al.*^[4] viewed gender as the roles and relationships between men and women in a given context. Ametefe and Ametefe^[5] conceptualized gender as a social construct that establishes and differentiates status and role between men

and women, particularly in the way they contribute to, participate in and are rewarded by the economy and most social institutions. Egbe^[6] views gender as a psychological term describing behaviour and attributes expected of individuals based on being born either male or female. According to the WHO.^[7], gender describes the characteristics, roles and responsibilities of men and women, boys and girls which are socially constructed. These definitions suppose that gender involves attitudes, roles, practices and characteristics based on sex. It is socially construed, may differ from one society to another and reflects particular power relations between men and women. It refers to roles and responsibilities ascribed or allowed to either a man or a woman by the society. Gender is defined in this study as a social construct describing behaviour and attributes expected of individuals on the basis of being born either male or female. It involves social attributes and opportunities prevalent in the relationship between men and women, boys and girls. These attributes and relationships are socially constructed and learned through socialization processes.

Gender role is defined by the society and this influences the individual's interaction and relationship with others^[8]. Aliu-Chatta^[9] holds that gender role represents roles that are assigned by the society and their expectations on account of sexism. Sexism, according to Aja-Okorie, manifests in different forms such as in power divisions and other gender relations. As a result of this, men and women are placed in the structure which established the framework within which men and women gain their identities, formulate their goals and carry out their training. Wolfolk^[10] posited that gender roles are socio-cultural expectations that prescribe how males and females should think, act and feel. Thus, gender roles refer to a set of cultural expectations that regulate or stipulate the ways of behaviour of each sex.

Gender disparity has been observed by scholars such as Ukhun and Asekhauno^[11] in their submission that gender disparity involves societal preferences between males and females. Okagu^[12] argued that gender disparity shapes individual preferences and power relations between sexes and dictates the type of work considered appropriate for individuals. Thus, one is born and labelled male or female biologically but learns to be masculine or feminine. Maduwesi^[13] holds that women and men are biologically different but all cultures interpret and elaborate these inherent biological differences into a set of social expectations about what behaviours and activities are appropriate for them and what rights, resources and even power they possess. Ibia^[14] expressed that gender disparity stems from the belief that men were superior to women in all ramifications. Thus while scholars such as Osuala and Oguoma^[15] have argued that gender disparity

tilts in favour of the male folk in all ramifications and that males are more preferred to females in leadership positions, others such as Roesler argue that the female folk perform better and are more preferred in leadership positions.

There are various opinions concerning gender and work stress by scholars. For instance, Antoniou *et al.*^[16] opined that men may more likely suffer pressure arising from work stress than females. Matud^[17] observed that women may experience more stress than men and may handle stress better. According to Akubue and Okolo^[18] human activities throughout the world are organized according to social differentiation that people make between men and women or by gender. The World Health Organization (WHO) in their report averred that gender determines the differential power and control men and women have over the socioeconomic determinants of their mental health and lives, their social positions, status and treatment in society and their susceptibility and exposure to specific mental health risks. They further maintained that gender differences occur particularly in the rates of common mental disorders, depression, anxiety and somatic complaints. Miller, in Ukpa^[18] averred that males are stronger, faster, possesses longer endurance and greater stamina than females which leads to the presupposition that male administrators are more resistant to stress-inducing situations than their female counterparts. Maduakolam^[19] observed that women differ from men in work stress experience and management not only because of sex stereotyping but also because they are concerned about their family, thus, women with their feminine characteristics are more vulnerable to stress.

However, researchers such as Winefield and Jarret^[20] hold that an individual may suffer from the effects of stress at work irrespective of gender differences. According to Wiggins^[21], stress generate undesirable or unhealthy responses from workers. Oboegbulem and Onwurah^[22] submit that stress can be explained in terms of its closely-related concepts: anxiety, conflict and frustration. According to the authors, 'anxiety' is an emotion characterized by a feeling of anticipated danger, tension and distress. It is a state of being anxious or of expecting a strong or dominating blend of uncertainty and agitation; an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear, often marked by such physical symptoms as tension, sweating, palpitation and increased pulse rate. 'Conflict' is an emotional state characterized by indecision, restlessness, uncertainty and tension resulting from incompatible inner needs or drives of comparable intensity. 'Frustration,' according to the authors, occurs in a situation in which the pursuit of a goal is thwarted or when an individual wants something and cannot have it. Osif observed that stressor is considered to include work pressure, harassments at work, exposure to traumatic events, lack of autonomy and support and exposure to workplace and occupational

violence. Scholars have classified the different types of stressors into three categories which include: catastrophic events, major life events and daily hassles/microstressors. Catastrophic events have been defined by Michailidis and Asimenos as sudden, often life-threatening calamities or disasters that push people to the outer limits of their coping capacities. According to Pastorino and Doyle^[23] catastrophic events are unforeseen and unpredictable and as such are completely out of the control of the individual. The authors gave examples of catastrophic events to include: devastating natural disasters such as major floods or earthquakes, wars, fire outbreaks, automobile accidents, violent physical attacks, sexual assaults, among others.

Babu holds that mental stress can arise due to various conflicts at work and home which if not managed correctly can lead to impaired logical thinking and various mental illnesses. Other manifestations of mental stress on individuals as submitted by Edwards include nervousness, forgetfulness, anxiety, inability to concentrate, indecisiveness, inability to clearly think, feelings of frustration and helplessness, negative self-concept or loss of self-confidence and many more. Babu concludes that unresolved mental stress can translate into physical illnesses known as 'psychosomatic illnesses', induce people to become alcoholic addicts, show signs of anorexia or loss of appetite, lead to drug and nicotine dependency and many more. Michie^[24] sees work stress as an individual's reaction to the characteristics of the work environment that appear threatening to such a one. Netemeyer *et al.*^[25] simply referred to it as job-related nervousness and anxiety which affect human's physical and emotional health. Scholars have noted that certain physical working environmental factors, especially unsatisfactory working conditions can affect the well-being of workers. Okeke^[26] observed that the work environment of lecturers may account in no small measure for lack of concentration and incongruous behaviour on the job performance.

Ukpai^[18] referred to job performance as an act of carrying out specific daily tasks in an organization. Viswesvaran *et al.*^[27] viewed job performance as actions, behaviours and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that is linked with and contribute to organizational goals. Miewald in Peretomode^[28] holds that administration is how formal goals are achieved through co-operative human effort. Peretomode^[28] viewed administration as being concerned with the performance of executive duties, the carrying out of policies and decisions to fulfil a purpose and the controlling of the day-to-day running of an organization. It seems universities administration may differ from other administration. Anao described a university as a unique type of institution which the society generally looks up to as a vehicle for promoting the realization of human

potentials and advancement of national development and well being of society. Arikewuyo^[29] referred to universities as enterprises that produce and distribute knowledge which is a public good. However, it seems like university administration is not achieving its objectives irrespective of key roles played by men and women of administration. It is against this background that the study deemed it necessary to ascertain the impact of gender on work stress among university administrators in South-East, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was to ascertain the impact of gender on work stress among academic university administrators in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the:

Research question: What is the mean difference in work stress among male and female academic administrators in public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Hypothesis: The hypothesis below was raised and tested at 0.05 probability level. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities about the impact of work stress on job performance based on gender.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopted a descriptive survey design. The study included both federal and state universities in South-East, Nigeria which includes: Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State; Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, Anambra State; Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State; Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu; Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State; Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State; Imo State University, Owerri; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Umuahia, Abia State; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State. The Work Stress of Academic Administrators Questionnaire (WSAAQ) which consists of 30-items enabled the researchers to gather data for the study. The WSAAQ has four-point rating scale ranging from strongly agreed (4 point) to strongly disagreed (1 point) with Cronbach alpha of 0.90. The WSAAQ was validated by three experts and trial-tested with 30 academic administrators. The WSAAQ was administered directly to the respondents by the researchers with the help of three research assistants. Data was collected from the respondents using the direct delivery method. Mean and standard deviation was used in answering the research question while t-test was used for hypothesis testing.

RESULTS

Research question: What is the mean difference in workstress among male and female academic administrators in public universities in South-East Nigeria?

Data on Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations of responses on the impact of work stress on academic administrators' job performance in universities

in South-East Nigeria based on gender. The result of the study showed that the male respondents agreed on items 1-17, 19, 21, 23-26 and 28 as being the impact of work stress on academic administrator's job performance. The female respondents, on the other hand, agreed on items 1-14, 17, 19, 21, 23-26 and 28 as the impact of work stress on academic administrator's job performance. For both the male and female respondents, the mean ratings were above the 2.50 benchmark for accepting an

Table 1: Mean difference in workstress among male and female academic administrators in Public Universities in South-East Nigeria

| Item statements | Male, N = 493 | | | Female, N = 252 | | |
|--|---------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | \bar{X}_1 | SD ₁ | Dec ₁ | \bar{X}_2 | SD ₂ | Dec ₂ |
| When I am under stress at work | | | | | | |
| Health challenges: | | | | | | |
| 1. I experience burnout which reduces my efficiency at work | 2.70 | 0.78 | A | 2.75 | 0.80 | A |
| 2. I usually suffer a loss of memory which makes me get involved in workplace accidents | 3.05 | 0.84 | A | 3.10 | 0.83 | A |
| 3. I am prone to heart diseases such as high blood pressure which reduces my ability to do my job | 3.04 | 0.77 | A | 2.99 | 0.77 | A |
| 4. I often suffer headaches and muscle pains which hinder my job performance | 2.76 | 0.77 | A | 2.74 | 0.77 | A |
| 5. I suffer gastrointestinal diseases such as diarrhoea which makes me achieve less in my job performance | 2.75 | 0.79 | A | 2.78 | 0.78 | A |
| 6. I experience eating disorders such as loss of appetite which lowers my strength for work | 2.99 | 0.82 | A | 2.98 | 0.83 | A |
| 7. I experience sleep difficulties such as insomnia which makes me unable to respond quickly to demands placed on me | 2.79 | 0.74 | A | 2.82 | 0.76 | A |
| 8. I resort to alcoholic beverages leading to loss of focus in the performance of my job | 2.81 | 0.76 | A | 2.80 | 0.78 | A |
| 9. I usually incur high costs of health care which dampens my zest for performance in my job | 3.22 | 0.76 | A | 3.25 | 0.78 | A |
| Job tension | | | | | | |
| 10. I feel tensed which reduces my ability to do my work | 2.75 | 0.74 | A | 2.80 | 0.76 | A |
| 11. I experience difficulties in concentration leading to aggressiveness to staff and students | 2.58 | 0.68 | A | 2.61 | 0.69 | A |
| 12. I find it difficult to communicate effectively with my staff leading to serious misunderstandings | 2.90 | 0.81 | A | 2.96 | 0.79 | A |
| 13. I am unable to complete tasks on time due to frequent mood swings | 3.04 | 0.73 | A | 3.11 | 0.74 | A |
| 14. I find it difficult to make decisions that affect the lives of my staff and students | 2.61 | 0.71 | A | 2.50 | 0.72 | A |
| 15. I am often late to important appointments that have to do with my job | 2.50 | 0.69 | A | 2.41 | 0.73 | D |
| 16. I often make careless mistakes in the course of performing my job | 2.54 | 0.71 | A | 2.45 | 0.73 | D |
| 17. I often forget important things which render me incapable of meeting up with my work schedules | 2.80 | 0.64 | A | 2.80 | 0.66 | A |
| Low morale/low job satisfaction | | | | | | |
| 18. I usually experience low morale which reduces my ability to perform my job | 2.36 | 0.48 | D | 2.43 | 0.50 | D |
| 19. I experience loss of interest in my job which reduces my motivation for task accomplishments | 2.63 | 0.51 | A | 2.63 | 0.55 | A |
| 20. I am often absent from office and classes due to loss of interest in my job | 2.38 | 0.48 | D | 2.42 | 0.49 | D |
| 21. I am unable to perform my supervisory role on my staff due to low morale in my job | 2.60 | 0.52 | A | 2.63 | 0.53 | A |
| 22. I often desire to quit my job due to feelings of dissatisfaction | 2.44 | 0.68 | D | 2.42 | 0.64 | D |
| 23. Low morale in my job negatively affects my staff members in their job performance | 2.63 | 0.54 | A | 2.65 | 0.51 | A |
| Poor work relationships | | | | | | |
| 24. I often shout and yell at my staff which hampers their confidence in their job performance | 2.62 | 0.67 | A | 2.69 | 0.65 | A |
| 25. I find it difficult to delegate responsibilities to my subordinates which increases my workload | 2.53 | 0.69 | A | 2.58 | 0.67 | A |
| 26. I often withdraw to myself leading to loss of sense of responsibility in my job | 2.58 | 0.70 | A | 2.61 | 0.68 | A |
| 27. I am predisposed to blaming others which erode staff morale for productivity | 2.27 | 0.55 | D | 2.31 | 0.58 | D |
| 28. I find it difficult to listen to my subordinate which obstructs teamwork | 2.51 | 0.68 | A | 2.56 | 0.68 | A |
| 29. I find it difficult to express appreciation to my staff which lowers their commitment to their jobs | 2.38 | 0.66 | D | 2.42 | 0.66 | D |
| 30. I am often intolerant of the mistakes of my staff which hinders their creativity at work | 2.37 | 0.62 | D | 2.37 | 0.64 | D |
| Cluster mean | 2.67 | 0.24 | A | 2.69 | 0.24 | A |

item. Also, the male respondents disagreed on items 18, 20, 22, 27, 29 and 30 while the female respondents disagreed on items 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 27, 29 and 30 with both male and female respondents having mean ratings of <2.50 in the items. However, the cluster mean scores of 2.67 with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.24 (for male respondents) and 2.69 with a standard deviation of 0.24 (for female respondents) showed that the respondents agree that majority of the items listed on Table 1 are the impact of work stress on job performance of male and female academic administrators of universities in South East, Nigeria.

Data on Table 2 shows the t-test analysis of the significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities about the impact

of work stress on job performance based on gender. The result showed that there is no significant difference in all the items except item 14. This is because their significant values are >0.05 level of significance. A cluster t-value of -0.76 at 743 degree of freedom and significant value of 0.44 was obtained. Since, the significant value of 0.44 is >0.05 set as the level of significance, it means that the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities about the impact of work stress on job performance based on gender is accepted. Inference drawn therefore is that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities about the impact of work stress on job performance based on gender.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities with regard to the impact of work stress on job performance based on gender

| | Male (N = 493) | | Female = 252) | | | | | |
|--|----------------|------|---------------|------|-------|-----|------|-----|
| Items | \bar{X} | SD | \bar{X} | SD | t-cal | df | Sig. | Dec |
| When I am under stress at work | | | | | | | | |
| Health challenges: | | | | | | | | |
| 1. I experience burnout which reduces my efficiency at work | 2.70 | 0.78 | 2.75 | 0.80 | -0.86 | 743 | 0.38 | NS |
| 2. I usually suffer a loss of memory which makes me get involved in workplace accidents | 3.05 | 0.84 | 3.10 | 0.83 | 0.77 | 743 | 0.44 | NS |
| 3. I am prone to heart diseases such as high blood pressure which reduces my ability to do my job | 3.04 | 0.77 | 2.99 | 0.77 | 0.91 | 743 | 0.36 | NS |
| 4. I often suffer headaches and muscle pains which hinder my job performance | 2.76 | 0.77 | 2.74 | 0.77 | 0.26 | 743 | 0.79 | NS |
| 5. I suffer gastrointestinal diseases such as diarrhoea which makes me achieve less in my job performance | 2.75 | 0.79 | 2.78 | 0.78 | -0.43 | 743 | 0.66 | NS |
| 6. I experience eating disorders such as loss of appetite which lowers my strength for work | 2.99 | 0.82 | 2.98 | 0.83 | 0.09 | 743 | 0.93 | NS |
| 7. I experience sleep difficulties such as insomnia which makes me unable to respond quickly to demands placed on me | 2.79 | 0.74 | 2.82 | 0.76 | -0.44 | 743 | 0.66 | NS |
| 8. I resort to alcoholic beverages leading to loss of focus in the performance of my job | 2.81 | 0.76 | 2.80 | 0.78 | 0.11 | 743 | 0.91 | NS |
| 9. I usually incur high costs of health care which dampens my zest for performance in my job | 3.22 | 0.76 | 3.25 | 0.78 | -0.36 | 743 | 0.72 | NS |
| Job tension | | | | | | | | |
| 10. I feel tensed which reduces my ability to do my work | 2.75 | 0.74 | 2.80 | 0.76 | -0.92 | 743 | 0.35 | NS |
| 11. I experience difficulties in concentration leading to aggressiveness to staff and students | 2.58 | 0.68 | 2.61 | 0.69 | -0.62 | 743 | 0.53 | NS |
| 12. I find it difficult to communicate effectively with my staff leading to serious misunderstandings | 2.90 | 0.81 | 2.96 | 0.79 | -1.01 | 743 | 0.31 | NS |
| 13. I am unable to complete tasks on time due to frequent mood swings | 3.04 | 0.73 | 3.11 | 0.74 | -1.31 | 743 | 0.19 | NS |
| 14. I find it difficult to make decisions that affect the lives of my staff and students | 2.61 | 0.71 | 2.50 | 0.72 | 2.02 | 743 | 0.03 | S |
| 15. I am often late to important appointments that have to do with my job | 2.50 | 0.69 | 2.41 | 0.73 | 1.79 | 743 | 0.07 | NS |
| 16. I often make careless mistakes in the course of performing my job | 2.54 | 0.71 | 2.45 | 0.73 | 1.70 | 743 | 0.08 | NS |
| 17. I often forget important things which render me incapable of meeting up with my work schedules | 2.80 | 0.64 | 2.80 | 0.66 | 0.09 | 743 | 0.93 | NS |
| Low morale/low job satisfaction | | | | | | | | |
| 18. I usually experience low morale which reduces my ability to perform my job | 2.36 | 0.48 | 2.43 | 0.50 | -1.61 | 743 | 0.11 | NS |
| 19. I experience loss of interest in my job which reduces my motivation for task accomplishments | 2.63 | 0.51 | 2.63 | 0.55 | -0.01 | 743 | 0.99 | NS |
| 20. I am often absent from office and classes due to loss of interest in my job | 2.38 | 0.48 | 2.42 | 0.49 | -1.19 | 743 | 0.24 | NS |
| 21. I am unable to perform my supervisory role on my staff due to low morale in my job | 2.60 | 0.52 | 2.63 | 0.53 | -0.85 | 743 | 0.39 | NS |

Table 2: Continue

| Items | Male (N = 493) | | Female = 252) | | t-cal | df | Sig. | Dec |
|---|----------------|------|---------------|------|-------|-----|------|-----|
| | \bar{X} | SD | \bar{X} | SD | | | | |
| 22. I often desire to quit my job due to feelings of dissatisfaction | 2.44 | 0.68 | 2.42 | 0.64 | 0.41 | 743 | 0.67 | NS |
| 23. Low morale in my job negatively affects my staff members in their job performance | 2.63 | 0.54 | 2.65 | 0.51 | -0.59 | 743 | 0.55 | NS |
| Poor work relationships | | | | | | | | |
| 24. I often shout and yell at my staff which hampers their confidence in their job performance | 2.62 | 0.67 | 2.69 | 0.65 | -1.39 | 743 | 0.16 | NS |
| 25. I find it difficult to delegate responsibilities to my subordinates which increases my workload | 2.53 | 0.69 | 2.58 | 0.67 | -0.93 | 743 | 0.35 | NS |
| 26. I often withdraw to myself leading to loss of sense of responsibility in my job | 2.58 | 0.70 | 2.61 | 0.68 | -0.61 | 743 | 0.54 | NS |
| 27. I am predisposed to blaming others which erode staff morale for productivity | 2.27 | 0.55 | 2.31 | 0.58 | -0.84 | 743 | 0.39 | NS |
| 28. I find it difficult to listen to my subordinates which obstructs teamwork | 2.51 | 0.68 | 2.56 | 0.68 | -1.03 | 743 | 0.30 | NS |
| 29. I find it difficult to express appreciation to my staff which lowers their commitment to their jobs | 2.38 | 0.66 | 2.42 | 0.66 | -0.75 | 743 | 0.45 | NS |
| 30. I am often intolerant of the mistakes of my staff which hinders their creativity at work | 2.37 | 0.62 | 2.37 | 0.64 | 0.01 | 743 | 0.99 | NS |
| Cluster t | 2.67 | 0.24 | 2.69 | 0.24 | -0.76 | 743 | 0.44 | NS |

DISCUSSION

The finding corroborates that of Al-Omar^[30] who reported that work stress may affect all employees irrespective of gender differences. However, the finding disagrees with the opinion of Liu and Zhu^[31] that men are more likely to experience more stress than women. It further disagrees with the assertion of Nnabuihe., etc. that work stress is likely to be profound among female lecturers than their male counterparts. This finding could be attributed to the fact that individuals have different ways of adjustments with different coping styles, they adopt different coping mechanisms and are free to use whatever strategy that works for them.

Academic administrators adopt strategies that suit their circumstances which may neutralize the gender effect as academic administrators, whether male or female, face the same challenges due to their official positions and responsibilities. Thus, they are equally exposed to the same stressful situations at work with some implications on their job performance. Individuals have different ways of adjustments with different coping styles, they adopt different coping mechanisms and are free to use whatever strategy that works for them.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities about the impact of work stress on job performance based on gender. The government should employ both male and female at an equal rate without bias of any kind.

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