

Participation of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Partners in the Cross-Sector Handling System for Child Sexual Violence Cases

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Abstract. Sexual violence against children is a serious issue that requires comprehensive handling through cross-sector collaboration. The management of cases involves not only the government but also non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which play a crucial role in advocacy, victim assistance, and strengthening child protection systems. This study aims to analyze the participation of NGO partners in the cross-sector system for handling cases of child sexual violence in North Sumatra Province. This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive study method through in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and observations of government institutions and NGOs involved in child protection. The findings indicate that NGOs play roles in several key aspects, including psychosocial support for victims, policy advocacy, community capacity building, and coordination with government institutions such as social services, the police, and women and child protection agencies. However, challenges remain in cross-sector coordination, resource limitations, and the suboptimal integration of service systems. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen coordination mechanisms, enhance institutional capacity, and develop an integrated service system to improve the effectiveness of handling child sexual violence cases. The results show that the participation of NGO partners makes a significant contribution to the cross-sector system, particularly in providing legal and psychosocial assistance for victims, facilitating case reporting processes, and conducting public outreach and education. The involvement of NGOs also expands the reach of child protection services and strengthens inter-agency coordination in handling cases of child sexual violence.

Keywords: Sexual Violence; NGO; Cross-Sector; Child Protection.

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INTRODUCTION

Cases of sexual violence represent a highly complex social problem. Their handling encompasses not only criminal justice but also mental and psychological aspects. Sexual violence can affect not only adult women but also children. Children are an inseparable part of the continuity of human life. In the Indonesian constitution, children hold a strategic role, as it is explicitly stated that the state guarantees every child's right to survival, growth and development, as well as protection from violence and discrimination. Therefore, the best interests of the child must be considered as the best interest for the survival of the nation's children. Children need protection from the negative impacts of rapid development, the currents of globalization in communication and information, scientific advances, as well as changes in the lifestyles and ways of some parents, which have brought about fundamental social changes in society that greatly influence children's behavior. Not a few children are forced into and must be involved in situations

they should not experience, even becoming victims of painful treatment, whether by professional criminals, such as rape. Cases of violence against children increase significantly every year. There is no definitive data on the number of violence cases occurring against children. The data collected by several institutions only provides an overview, meaning the presented data does not reflect the actual facts. This scarcity of data on child violence cases occurs due to the habit within society of treating this issue as an internal family matter, and something inappropriate or taboo to be openly exposed. The increase is not only in terms of quantity or the number of cases occurring, but also in quality. More tragically, the perpetrators are mostly from the immediate environment, such as biological parents, step-parents, uncles, neighbor's drivers, teachers, and other (Lewoleba & Fahrozi, 2020). Sexual violence against children is a serious issue that continues to rise in Indonesia, including in North Sumatra Province. The complexity of the cases demands a comprehensive cross-sectoral handling system, as mandated by Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection. In Indonesia, including North Sumatra, cases of child sexual violence are increasing, and this situation exacerbates the challenges in protecting children from the threat of violence.

Based on data compiled by the Women's Empowerment Agency, the number of cases of sexual violence against children reported through August 2025 remains high. A total of 357 cases were recorded, consisting of 42 cases involving male victims and 315 cases involving female victims. The predominance of female victims indicates that girls are a group that is more vulnerable to sexual violence. The high number of cases further underscores that sexual violence against children is a serious problem that requires special attention, given that the majority of victims are under the age of 18.

This situation is also a concern in the city of Medan, which ranks as the city with the second-highest number of victims of violence in North Sumatra Province. The Medan City Government, through the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB), continues to work on prevention and response efforts to curb the rise in cases of sexual violence. However, these efforts still face challenges because cases of sexual violence against children are often difficult to identify and report. As a result, some cases are only brought to the attention of the authorities after they have reached a more serious stage. This situation underscores the importance of strengthening the response system—which involves various stakeholders, including NGOs—to expand the scope of prevention, support, reporting, and protection for victims. The government has promoted a multisectoral

partnership approach to addressing cases of sexual violence against children. This partnership system involves many actors, one of which is the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). The involvement of NGOs in this system plays a role in policy advocacy, legal assistance, psychosocial services, education, and monitoring policy implementation. The role of NGOs in reaching and assisting victims of violence has been reinforced by several previous studies. Utama & Heryanto (2026) points out that these services still face challenges in the form of limited human resources and the need to strengthen the complaint system. Das & Rani (2024) emphasizes that the effectiveness of services for women and children depends heavily on collaboration among stakeholders through network governance. Meanwhile, Tutty (2015) highlights the importance of shelters in protecting victims of sexual violence. These findings underscore the importance of NGO involvement and collaboration. These findings confirm that the involvement of NGOs and cross-sector collaboration play a crucial role in assisting victims.

In the context of handling sexual violence cases, the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) plays a very important role. NGOs contribute by providing assistance services for victims, such as legal aid, psychological counseling, and social rehabilitation. Additionally, NGOs also play a role in raising public awareness through education and prevention campaigns, as well as advocating for policies that support victim protection. Thus, NGO participation reflects active engagement based on care and social responsibility to support comprehensive handling of sexual violence cases. Based on this strategic role of NGOs, the researcher seeks to describe NGO participation in the cross-sectoral system for handling child sexual violence cases in North Sumatra Province. The researcher hopes that understanding NGO participation can also increase community involvement to create an inclusive environment, considering that the phenomenon of child sexual violence is closely related to community culture. (Researcher observation, 2025).

Observations show that victims of sexual violence, particularly children, are less likely to report the incidents they have experienced. For instance, many child sexual violence cases remain unrevealed or are not handled properly, either due to a lack of understanding of children's rights, social stigma against victims, or limitations within the existing legal system. Furthermore, children who are victims of sexual violence often do not receive optimal recovery, either psychologically or socially, which ultimately affects their long-term quality of life. This reinforces the need to increase the number of NGOs engaged as partners. In fact, victim assistance provided by NGOs is crucial for victims in the process of resolving criminal cases. Additionally, regarding the rehabilitation needed by victims, NGOs often take the more dominant role. The

researcher observes that the strategic role of NGOs is crucial in ensuring victims receive comprehensive assistance from reporting to recovery, thus their presence in cross-sectoral services is highly necessary. This confirms that NGO participation in handling sexual violence is essential. The word 'participation' comes from the English word "participation," which means taking part, involvement. Meanwhile, the word "participation" originates from the word "participate," which means to involve oneself (Cornwall & Pratt, 2011). In line with this definition, participation can be interpreted as the active involvement or engagement of a person in an activity.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design, as it focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of NGO participation in cross-sectoral systems for addressing cases of sexual violence against children. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), the qualitative approach aims to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social issue. Research data were collected through structured and in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, involving stakeholders in the system for addressing sexual violence against children, such as the Chair of the Special Child Protection Working Group, the Head of the Administrative Section of the UPT PPA, the Medan City PPA Task Force, the LBH APIK NGO, and the Center for Child Studies and Protection (PKPA). Next, the data were analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, thereby providing a systematic overview of the forms of participation, coordination, and contributions of NGOs in addressing cases of sexual violence against children. The research was conducted in North Sumatra Province. In this article, the aspects examined include step-by-step procedures for assisting victims, legal assistance, psychosocial services, and education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Center for Child Studies and Protection (PKPA) and the Legal Aid Institute of the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH APIK) are NGOs that are actively involved in handling victims, particularly in victim assistance. These two NGOs provide nearly similar victim assistance services. Therefore, the established partnership is intended to complement each other in the service lines needed by victims. Victims need complaint services that are easily accessible, followed by an initial assessment or counseling process, then a psychological guidance process for the recovery of the victim's mental state, and the availability of a safe house.

The resolution of sexual violence cases begins with reports received through online complaint services, such as WhatsApp or a hotline. Subsequently, an assessment stage is

conducted to identify the victim's condition and needs. This stage is important as an initial step in the intake process, which then becomes the basis for developing a protection plan according to the assessment results and the victim's needs. This assessment includes identifying psychological impacts and the need for assistance, whether medical, psychological, legal, or other forms of help. These assessment services can be accessed through PKPA and LBH APIK. After that, victims receive mental recovery services in the form of ongoing consultations with a psychologist. This service aims to support the healing of the victim's psychological condition through accurate diagnosis, counseling, and the provision of medical therapy if necessary.

Furthermore, victims can also receive legal assistance as needed. In the process of handling sexual violence cases, the availability of a safe house often becomes crucial as temporary shelter for the victim, especially if the victim cannot return to an environment where the perpetrator is known. However, safe house services are currently only available at the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) and LBH APIK. This situation underscores the importance of the partnership between PKPA and relevant agencies, as an effort to synergize available facilities and infrastructure so that they can be integrated even though they come from different institutions.

The Medan City Government recognizes that the availability of safe house facilities owned by these agencies is still insufficient, given the increasing number of sexual violence cases. Therefore, handling sexual violence cases requires cross-sectoral cooperation so that services provided to victims can run optimally. This explains that the involvement of both NGOs as partners reflects a significant role in handling victims of violence. The involvement of NGOs reflects that the resolution of sexual violence cases requires a strong coordination network, which not only relies on community participation in building social awareness but also on the active participation of various parties in the sustainable handling of victims until trauma recovery is achieved. (Luz, 2022). Trauma resulting from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), such as Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), can lead to impairments in cognitive function, behavior, social skills, and various other aspects of life. These impacts also affect the victim's development, which can be observed in daily activities, thereby affirming that sexual abuse remains an important issue requiring serious attention within society. Without appropriate intervention, sexual trauma can persist into adulthood and potentially increase the risk of re-enactment of violence by individuals who have experienced sexual abuse. This condition aligns with the concept of participation, which emphasizes active, collaborative, and sustained involvement from various stakeholders across all stages of handling social conflicts.

Participation emphasizes that the involvement of actors in an activity is not limited merely to taking part but also reflects responsibility and tangible contributions toward achieving shared goals. Participation is no longer understood simply as physical presence or involvement; rather, it encompasses meaningful participation in decision-making processes and program implementation (Dondokambey et al., 2023). Menurut Cornwall (2014), Participation emphasizes active involvement in decision-making spaces that enable actors to have a voice and influence over policies that affect their lives. Meanwhile, Gaventa & Cornwall (2015) explain that participation is closely related to power, where the involved actors are not merely present but also possess the capacity to influence policy outcomes and direction. Thus, effective participation requires access, control, and capacity from the actors involved.

The participation of the Center for Child Studies and Protection (PKPA) is reflected through active involvement in providing psychological assistance services, providing temporary safe houses, and referring victims to obtain comprehensive protection. From a modern perspective on participation, PKPA not only acts as a service provider but also as an actor with the capacity to influence case handling through its experience and data. Meanwhile, the Legal Aid Institute of the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH APIK) demonstrates strong participation in the dimensions of power and advocacy. LBH APIK plays a role in providing legal aid, accompanying victims through the judicial process, and fighting for victims' rights to obtain justice. This role reflects participation that is not merely implementative but also transformative, as it seeks to change structures that are less favorable to victims.

Table 1. Data on Violence Cases at the Center for Child Studies and Protection (PKPA)

No	Year	Sexual Violence	Physical Violence	Total
1	2023	8	-	8
2	2024	5	4	9
3	2025	3	2	5
TOTAL				22

Source: Report on Child Sexual and Physical Violence Data for the Years 2023-2025, 2025)

The data in Table 1, compiled by PKPA, demonstrates this NGO's commitment to monitoring the development of sexual violence cases. The observed decrease in the number of cases validates that awareness-raising about sexual violence has been conducted massively. LBH APIK also does the same, maintaining annual records compiled every year. Additionally, LBH APIK conducts outreach to schools and universities regarding violence and disseminates the fastest accessible reporting methods. The biggest obstacle here is the lack of willingness and

trust from parents to cooperate with teachers, as well as the lack of collaboration between schools and external institutions, which results in a fragmented care system (Nurjannah et al., 2024). In short, both NGOs also contribute to raising public awareness through education and outreach, which is part of the effort to expand public participation in preventing child sexual violence. The involvement of PKPA and LBH APIK not only demonstrates their participation but also reflects meaningful participation that has influence and is oriented toward social change in handling child sexual violence cases (LBH APIK, 2025).

The high sense of responsibility they possess is the primary reason these two NGOs were selected as partners of the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Community Empowerment, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3APMP2KB). This indicates that before formally establishing a partnership, both organizations had already proven their commitment and consistency through their tangible presence in assisting and empowering the community. This dedication serves as a strong foundation for building trust and sustainable cooperation. Women's empowerment is one of the important issues in achieving gender equality, particularly in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality is strategic across various sectors, such as poverty alleviation, improving education, and economic growth. Gender equality in the context of the SDGs must consider complex socio-cultural dynamics, especially in North Sumatra. However, the biggest challenge in promoting gender equality is the still-dominant patriarchal culture, including within customary structures. This condition shows that efforts to achieve gender equality in the context of the SDGs must consider complex socio-cultural dynamics. A culturally sensitive approach, involving traditional leaders in discussions about the importance of women's roles in development, can help create more significant and sustainable change. In this regard, the SDGs serve as a global framework that encourages reform at the local level. Gender awareness is a driver for the success of other SDGs because when women are empowered, they can actively contribute to their community's development, reduce poverty, improve health, and promote quality education for future generations. Thus, the role of gender equality in driving the success of the SDGs is not limited to moral and human rights aspects but is also a structural necessity for achieving sustainable development (Ngabito et al., 2025). Addressing the challenges faced by female victims of violence requires a holistic empowerment strategy involving active collaboration between the government, NGOs, and the community. The roles of PKPA and LBH APIK reflect meaningful participation that supports the achievement of the SDGs, particularly in justice and partnership within the context of handling sexual violence. Therefore, a holistic empowerment

strategy is needed in the context of women's empowerment so that it can be realized and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

Cross-Sector Collaboration in Case Handling

Having understood the roles of these two NGOs in handling child sexual violence, the sensitivity of such cases requires that their resolution be conducted confidentially and privately. The handling of child sexual violence cases in North Sumatra involves various institutions such as the police, social services, health agencies, and women and child protection units. NGOs act as partners in strengthening coordination among these institutions. This collaboration aims to ensure that the case handling process proceeds in an integrated manner, from reporting and investigation through to victim rehabilitation.

Based on (Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia Number 17 of 2017 concerning Initial Handling of Child and Women Protection, 2017) which explains the Task Force, DP3AP2KB implements the Community-Based Integrated Child Protection (PATBM) program. PATBM is a forum or group of citizens at the community level that works in a coordinated manner to achieve child protection goals. PATBM is a community initiative that acts as the first detector or first responder to carry out prevention efforts by building public awareness to bring about changes in understanding, attitudes, and behaviors that provide protection to children. This movement can operate using existing institutional structures or, if necessary, by building new institutional structures (Sandi, 2020). This program has two functions: carrying out efforts to prevent violence against children and acting as the front line in obtaining information about cases of violence against children within the community. When a case occurs, the initial response is carried out at the village level through a report from PATBM, which is immediately followed up by the Medan City PPA Task Force by going to the location to identify and assess the victim's needs. The victim is then secured if necessary, and the handling results are reported to the UPT PPA for coordination of further services. The PPA Task Force, consisting of district and city levels, works in a tiered manner, where the District Task Force can request support from the City Task Force if facing obstacles. In this process, the involvement of NGOs strengthens the handling, not only in legal assistance but also in psychosocial support and counseling. This collaboration is important to ensure that victims' needs are met more comprehensively, especially in terms of mental and emotional recovery.

The mechanism for handling child violence cases in Medan City already has a clear and tiered structure, with the PPA Task Force acting as an extension of the UPTD PPA in responding

to and reporting cases, as well as systematic coordination between the District Task Force and the City Task Force. Collaboration with PATBM and NGOs has also been established, supported by a clear legal basis. However, its implementation has not been optimal due to weak information dissemination, particularly regarding the existence of PATBM at the village level, which is not yet widely known due to a lack of socialization and coordination, thereby reducing the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention. However, the effectiveness of this cross-sector collaboration is still not optimal. This weak coordination has an impact on the suboptimal dissemination of information, particularly concerning the existence and function of PATBM at the village level, which is not yet widely known by the community. The communication flow, which has not been integrated, causes information not to be evenly distributed down to the lowest levels. Consequently, the role of PATBM as the frontline in prevention and early detection of cases cannot function maximally, thus reducing the overall effectiveness of the cross-sector collaborative child violence handling system. This indicates that collaboration has not yet run optimally due to weak communication, limited human resources, and the lack of an integrated information system between institutions. One of the main obstacles lies in the aspect of coordination and communication among actors (Susanti & Sarihati, 2025).

Policy Advocacy and Public Education

Thus far, NGOs assess that one of the root causes originates from the community, namely the low level of understanding about what to do when violence occurs in the community environment, lack of community supervision, and low legal awareness, which are primary factors contributing to the high rates of child sexual violence. This issue has become a serious concern requiring optimal attention and action. Furthermore, it has been found that there are deficiencies in inter-agency coordination and a need for improved public outreach and education regarding this matter (Adawiyah et al., 2025). This is supported by field evidence indicating that lack of public understanding, insufficient supervision, and low legal awareness are major contributors to the high rates of child sexual violence. Therefore, public education has become one of the important efforts undertaken. At the Center for Child Studies and Protection (PKPA), through its Child Information and Complaint Service Center (PUSPA) unit, outreach activities are conducted directly to the community. This outreach involves the village office, with the hope that local authorities can continue educating residents about the steps for initial response when violence against children occurs. Thus, the community is expected to become more responsive and capable of providing appropriate first aid. Additionally, PKPA has formed a children's community called the Child Protection Community Alliance, with the theme "Encouraging Inclusive

Collaboration among Child Communities in Ending Violence against Children" and has produced campaign videos to voice their aspirations, particularly in commemoration of International Children's Day (PKPA, 2025).

NGOs assess that the education sector is a strategic arena for shaping understanding, attitudes, and awareness from an early age regarding child protection issues and violence prevention. The roles of NGOs include psychosocial assistance, education, advocacy, and capacity building for victims. This aligns with the research findings of Azizah (2024) which show that NGOs play a role in supporting child victims of violence through psychosocial support, education, and skills development programs, so that services and handling for victims can proceed sustainably and in a mutually supportive manner. Therefore, education and outreach are conducted at several universities in Medan City as an effort to expand knowledge and increase student awareness of the importance of preventing and addressing violence in their surrounding environment. As carried out by LBH APIK, in addition to providing direct services to victims, LBH APIK Medan is also actively conducting outreach on campus as part of its education and advocacy efforts. One of its activities is realized through a class tour program with the theme "Criminal Acts of Sexual Violence in the World of Education," involving law faculty students at Dharmawangsa University. In this activity, students are invited to discuss the prevention and handling of sexual violence, while simultaneously strengthening the capacity of the younger generation to have a positive impact on themselves and their surrounding environment. This outreach also introduces the BANTU intervention method as a first-aid step for victims of sexual violence, provided through the Cari Layanan platform, so that participants not only understand the concept but also possess practical skills in responding to situations appropriately and empathetically. Additionally, this event was accompanied by the signing of an MoU and MoA between LBH APIK Medan and Dharmawangsa University as a form of commitment to cooperation in efforts to prevent and handle sexual violence within the educational environment, with the hope that all the material discussed can serve as a shared guideline and be implemented optimally.

Looking at what these two NGOs have done in their efforts to educate the public, it can be said that these steps have been in line with increasing public awareness of issues of violence and the protection of community rights. In addition to providing direct services to victims, NGOs are also actively engaged in policy advocacy and public education regarding the importance of child protection. Another important aspect is how victims of sexual violence, especially children, can be properly advocated. The efforts undertaken not only include assisting victims through the

reporting process to physical and mental recovery but are also continued with advocacy through campaign activities and the submission of policy demands to the government.

Not only through regulations as a form of support for vulnerable groups, but attention to the needs of victims in the recovery process is also a concern for NGOs. In this context, NGOs act as an extension of the community to advocate for the fulfillment of these needs by the government. Given that the advocacy process is not easy for the community to undertake without assistance, NGOs have an important role in ensuring the sustainable fulfillment of victims' rights. Challenges in the Cross-Sector System

Although NGO participation is quite significant, this study identifies several challenges in the implementation of the cross-sector system. These challenges include limitations in human resources and funding. The number of child sexual violence cases, which continues to increase each year, requires more human resources to provide assistance. Moreover, victims are minors, which necessitates greater effort in providing assistance, as conveyed by NGOs as one of the challenges they face. NGOs have a significant role in supporting child victims of violence; however, they face various challenges in program implementation. The main challenges encountered include funding limitations that hinder the sustainability and quality of services. In the implementation of assistance, it is not uncommon to find situations where victims discontinue the legal process or the ongoing psychological recovery process, thus posing a challenge to the sustainability of case handling. These conditions need to be aligned with the cross-sector handling flow so that the burden does not rest solely on service partners as the single responsible party. Therefore, resource sharing is a relevant action to strengthen the sustainability of handling, thereby providing a sense of security to victims and ultimately reducing the tendency to discontinue the ongoing assistance process.

This phenomenon occurs due to the low literacy and education of victims and their families. Furthermore, the assistance process is often perceived as slow and convoluted, while the psychological recovery process is seen as a lengthy phase that does not immediately yield visible results. The author assesses that the literacy education and outreach efforts undertaken by NGOs are not inadequate; rather, their reach needs to be expanded through strengthening the network of service partners. This can be done by increasing the involvement of other NGOs that specifically focus on the sustainability of the psychological and mental recovery process, so that existing service partners can focus more on their role in legal assistance.

The incomplete handling of cases in various aspects can result in the recurrence of violent acts, even to the point of threatening the victim's life. These challenges include limitations in

human resources and funding, lack of inter-agency coordination, and the suboptimal referral system for victim services. This aligns with the explanation by (Azizah, 2024) that NGOs must be creative in seeking donations and establishing cooperation with various parties. Additionally, human resource limitations are also an obstacle, as many volunteers are insufficiently trained and feel overwhelmed when handling complex cases, thus requiring more intensive and sustainable training. Another challenge comes from low public awareness, where many parents are still hesitant to bring their children to participate in counseling programs due to a lack of understanding of their benefits. Therefore, NGOs need to intensively conduct educational campaigns through seminars, workshops, and social media. Furthermore, complicated bureaucracy and weak coordination with government institutions also slow down program implementation, requiring NGOs to be patient and persistent in building good relationships and cooperation with the government. All these challenges demand that NGOs continuously strive to increase public awareness and participation to support the recovery of child victims of violence.

CONCLUSION

The participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Center for Child Studies and Protection (PKPA) and LBH APIK plays a very crucial role in handling cases of child sexual violence in North Sumatra Province, particularly through legal assistance, psychosocial services, the provision of safe houses, as well as education and policy advocacy. These two NGOs not only act as service providers but also as strategic actors who bridge the community with the government, advocate for victims' rights, and promote social change that is more favorable to child protection. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these roles still faces various significant challenges, such as funding limitations, a lack of trained human resources, low public awareness and trust, as well as weak coordination and bureaucracy among institutions within the cross-sector system. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen more synergistic partnerships between NGOs, the government, and the community, enhance volunteer capacity through continuous training, and expand the reach of public education so that the handling of child sexual violence can proceed holistically, sustainably, and optimally for the recovery of victims and the prevention of similar cases in the future.

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