

DOSSIÊ COVID-19 E SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA NO BRASIL

THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON POLICE ACTIVITIES: AN INTEGRATIONAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to organize and analyze Brazilian and international studies that investigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on police activities. An integrational review was used as a way of selecting the studies. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, twenty-six articles were selected, whose main results were the need for intervention and projects that focus on preserving the mental health of police officers, and the opportunity for police institutions to rethink their role in, and their relationship with the community. There is also a need to develop more research based on the impacts of COVID-19 on police activity.

Keywords: Pandemic. COVID-19. Police. Integrational review.

RESUMO

OS IMPACTOS DA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 NAS ATIVIDADES POLICIAIS: UMA REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA

O presente artigo tem como objetivo organizar e analisar os estudos nacionais e internacionais que investigam os impactos da pandemia de COVID-19 nas atividades policiais. Como forma metodológica de seleção dos estudos, adotou-se a revisão integrativa. Após a aplicação dos critérios de inclusão e exclusão resultou na seleção de 26 artigos, que apresentaram como principais resultados, a necessidade de intervenções e projetos voltados para preservação da saúde mental dos policiais e a oportunidade de as instituições policiais

repensarem seu papel e relação com a comunidade. Verificou-se também a necessidade de desenvolvimento de mais pesquisas voltadas para os impactos do COVID-19 na atividade policial.

Palavras-chave: *Pandemia. COVID-19. Polícia. Revisão Integrativa.*

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INTRODUCTION

The pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, a virus with high mutation and transmission rates, associated with a lack of vaccines, changed interpersonal relationships worldwide. Health measures were recommended to governments by the World Health Organization (WHO), in an attempt to reduce transmission and infection rates (BEZERRA *et al*, 2020). These acts imposed a “new normal” on people, creating a global need for adaptation and protection policies.

Preventive measures, like wearing masks, social distancing and social isolation, the use of hand sanitizer, and constantly washing food and hands are new ways of behaving and habits that have had to be learned in order to avoid the transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Prolonging the use of such preventive habits, however, will have negative consequences of a physical and psychological order in individuals (BEZERRA *et al*, 2020).

According to Bezerra *et al* (2020), Brazilians started adopting behaviors that threaten their health. A study of 47,184 Brazilians by way of a questionnaire revealed that during the COVID pandemic individuals engaged in less physical activity, increased the time they spent in front of screens (TVs, tablets, and computers), and reduced their consumption of healthy food, while increasing their consumption of ultra-processed food, and alcohol and tobacco. Other research carried out by online questionnaire with 3,223 Brazilians identified that in the first three months of social isolation during quarantine, there was an increase in stress, depression, panic crises, and anxiety (LIPP & LIPP, 2020).

In addition to evidence that reveals the general impact on everyday lives, the pandemic also had an impact on professional activities. In this respect, it was necessary for individuals and organizations to adapt to the new rules for performing tasks, where working from home was the main solution found in many professions. Some professionals, however, found it impossible to work away from their traditional place of work because they are involved with essential activities, such as being on the front line in the fight against COVID-19, or because they guarantee basic supplies for human life. Informal workers were also deeply impacted by the pandemic, making it impossible for them to carry out their work without considerable exposure to the risk of contamination (MATTEI & HEINEN, 2020).

Among the professionals considered as being on the front line in the fight against the pandemic were health professionals, immunology and virology scientists, and public security professionals. In a systematic review involving meta-analysis, Silva *et al* (2020) identified the prevalence of anxiety in 35% of all health professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a higher risk incidence in women and nurses, when compared to men and doctors. The study also found that some factors causing stress are more prevalent than others, such as: acting on the front line of the pandemic, the fear of infection or of being infected, and having a chronic disease.

In their integrational review, Teixeira *et al* (2020) assessed the mental stability of health professionals during the pandemic, and highlighted contamination risk and intense psychological distress as factors that compromised the participants' mental health. The main reports were of symptoms of anxiety, depression, a loss of sleep quality, drug abuse, psychosomatic symptoms, and fear of being infected or transmitting the virus to family members. This research also found the adverse effects caused by PPE, which is necessary for minimizing the risk of infection; continuous use of this equipment caused skin lesions on the nose, hands, cheeks, and forehead. Frequent hand washing increased the possibility of dermatitis in this region, leading to misuse of PPE and greater exposure to infection by professionals.

In a cross-sectional study using an online questionnaire with 332 medical doctors in Brazil, Brito-Marques *et al* (2021) found that 73.1% of the participants suffered from poor sleep quality during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus characterizing insomnia. Among the factors associated with the results were isolation, concerns about the COVID-19 outbreak, and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Like health professionals, police officers continued working during the pandemic and needed to develop appropriate techniques and responses to the challenges posed by COVID-19. The uniform police have no general protocol of health measures imposed by their managers that obliges them to comply with actions that guarantee their safety. The demands police officers face can compromise not just their professional activities, but also their physical and mental health.

These data are corroborated by the initial results found by Fernandes & Lima (2021), whose work tried to understand the multiple meanings and influences that compose the social representations of public security professionals vis-à-vis the pandemic and the way in which it has been faced in Brazil. Data analysis revealed that only 28.5% of participating police officers reported having received training that helped them face these new challenges. They also observed that only 12.5% of the state's civil police officers and 17.2% of federal police officers were aware of the booklets prepared by the *Secretaria Nacional de Segurança Pública* (SENASP) that give guidance on preventive measures and how to minimize COVID-19 contamination. The authors understand that the lack of training aggravated the high contamination rates in North and Northeastern states, which have the worst percentage of training and high infection levels.

A good example of the new skills developed by police officers is population containment order to ensure the WHO health recommendations in preventing the transmission of COVID-19. It is up to police officers to maintain physical distance, and to avoid crowded places without any ventilation. When there is a high contamination rate, they also need to ensure social isolation and that the limitations of freedom to go out are enforced.

Security professionals have the duty to ensure public and legal order, the accomplishment of health measures, and the sensation of social peace (BRASIL, 1988; MINAYO & ADORNO, 2013). The bases of the tasks undertaken by the uniform police are: hierarchy and discipline, implementing a vast system of punishment and reward, and directly linked to perform the work (SPODE & MERLO, 2006). Uniform police officers' activities include: enforcing public security policy; overt patrolling; ensuring a sense of social security; and maintaining public order by way of their technical-operational knowledge and instrumental tools inherent in supporting military activity (FRAGA, 2006).

These activities also have important peculiarities to be considered, such as the absence of any predetermined schedule, especially for the end of the shift, not having fixed labor hours, and the duty

to be available 24 hours a day to the State (FRAGA, 2006). Besides specific questions concerning task accomplishment, there are also particular aspects of the activity itself, because police officers act against crime and violence in their daily routine, patrol at night, and on highways, provide support at events, and other activities (BERNARDINO & BERNARDINO, 2018).

According to Bernardino & Bernardino (2018), police officers live in a permanent state of stress that complicates the relationship and balance between their professional and personal lives. In research carried out with police officers who have a disability that was acquired as a result of their work activities, one of the participants pointed out that a true police officer is one who is available 24 hours by day, which creates difficulties when it comes to enjoying moments outside when he is not at work (DE CASTILHO LOPES & PEREIRA LEITE, 2015).

These aspects are inherent to police officers' activities because they are stressors that have a direct influence on their professional tasks when they are associated with internal and external factors. According to Lipp & Malagris (2000, pp. 620), stress is "the reaction of an organism that has physical, psychological, mental, and hormonal components derived from the necessity of dealing with something that, at that moment, threatens mental or physical stability". Lipp & Malagris (2000) also highlight that incentives and stressors are diverse, i.e. pain, fear, loss of a loved one, speaking in front of others, or even being promoted or having a child, in such a way that is not possible to ascribe the reaction trigger to any particular factor.

According to Matarazzo *et al* (2020), the role of the police during the COVID-19 pandemic expanded, which implies rethinking professional practice and changing the perspective from the "war against crime" to one of humanitarian actions. For this to happen, the institutional structure, the information and operational protocols, and the symbolic and linguistic structures that allow closer contact with society must be modified.

Maskály *et al* (2021) investigated the changes that police institutions in twenty-seven countries underwent during the so-called "first wave" of the COVID pandemic. The study found that both police organizations and police activities changed in the participating countries. Among these changes, those related to internal bureaucratic police procedures were found to a great extent, and to a lesser extent changes in interactions with the community, which involve the role of the police as an institution for guaranteeing that citizen mobility is limited.

With regard to internal procedures, Maskály *et al* (2021) report that the interviewed police officers mentioned that the flow of information was very deficient or contradictory, which hindered the application of the new rules and procedures imposed because of the pandemic and their relationship with the community. This consideration was also observed by Matarazzo *et al* (2020), while in their study of Brazilian police officers Alcadipani *et al* (2020) found that a lack of information, training and specific protocols left police officers disoriented in the application of sanitary measures.

Among the procedural changes, Maskály *et al* (2021) found that police blitzes (68,2%), the way people were arrested (74%), and petty crime rates (56,6%) changed during the pandemic. The police administrators reported that learning and training procedures changed too, and started being carried out virtually, with distance working also being encouraged.

According to Jones (2020), because of the exponential virus infection process, the uniform police officers' responsibility for guaranteeing order and public health measures led to discussions about the

legitimacy of the police. According to the author, the more legitimate the police officers are seen to be by the community, the more likely it is that the latter will comply with the isolation and social distancing measures that are imposed. On the other hand, the more illegitimate the police are perceived to be, the more likely the community will be to fail to comply with the measures.

Despite the essential nature of the activity carried out by uniform police officers, and which poses risks to the lives of these professionals, and to those working in the health area, little is known about their experiences at the time of the pandemic. According to the Violence Monitor - (NEV-USP and *Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*), in Pará in 2020, 5,828 police officers out of a total of 19,561 stopped working due to COVID-19 infection. This number corresponds to 29,79% of the total police force of PM/PA. During this period there were forty-nine deaths from COVID-19, meaning that Pará was the state with the third highest number of police officers killed by the coronavirus. The study also states that the number of deaths caused by COVID-19 was more than double the number of police who were killed on the streets in the same period.

On May 2020, the *Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* (FBSP) published a technical note on the relationship between the pandemic and Brazilian police officers, which found that 68.8% of all Brazilian civil and uniform police, excluding those from the State of São Paulo, were, "(I) afraid of contracting or having someone close to me contaminated by the coronavirus." The data also revealed that 67.9% of police officers did not receive PPE. Additionally, 4.9% of Brazilian police officers stressed the fact that they were not ready to deal with the pandemic (LOTTA *et al*, 2020).

Pará, a Brazilian state with 8,690,745 people (IBGE, 2010) has 14,236 full-time uniform police officers in fourteen regions in the state (Metropolitan Region of Belém, Santarém, Marabá, Castanhal, Tucuruí, Redenção, Paragominas, Capanema, Altamira, Abaetetuba, Itaituba, Salvaterra, Breves and São Félix do Xingu). According to the IBGE (2014), Pará is the worst northern state in terms of the ratio of police to inhabitants, with just one police officer for every 500 people, and a deficit of 51.42% compared to the number expected by the Basic Police Organization Law of Pará.

Considering the essential nature of police officers' work and the risk to human life when exposed to coronavirus, the present study aims to organize and analyze Brazilian and international studies that have investigated the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

This study chose to undertake an integrational review of the literature, because its methodological scope allows its analytical content to include experimental, non-experimental, empirical and theoretical studies (SOUZA; SILVA & CARVALHO, 2010). Its construction followed Ganong's model (1987): 1) identification of the topic and selection of the main question of the research; 2) the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3) recognition of pre-selected studies; 4) categorization of the selected studies, 5) analysis and interpretation of the results; and 6) presentation of the knowledge review.

The main question of this research is: What are the principal impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on uniform police activity, since they are in the front line, fighting against virus transmission?

The P.V.O. technique was used to define the search descriptors, which is a variation of the PICO technique (RAMOS, 2015). "P" refers to the descriptors that are related to participants/contexts/sources, which were established as being "police officers"; "V" applies to the variables/categories to be investigated, in this case "pandemic impacts"; and "O" (outputs) are the expected results. "O" in this study was the analysis of published articles (author's name, title, year of publication), the objective nature (empirical or theoretical) of the article, and the place where the research was undertaken. In applying P.V.O., the following descriptors were selected: *Polícia*, *Policiais*, *Polícia Militar*, *Profissionais de Segurança Pública*, *Pandemia*, *Pandemia de COVID-19*, *COVID-19* and *SARS-COV- 2*, their corresponding translations in English being "Officer". "Police", "Police Organizations", "COVID-19 Pandemic" and "Pandemic".

Once the descriptors had been chosen, it was possible to build the procedures needed for achieving the search strategies. Platforms like *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES) and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) were chosen as the directories. These databases were chosen because they carry a wide range of works in diverse fields of knowledge.

The third step, the identification of pre-selected and selected studies, consisted of selecting articles after reading their titles and abstracts. Five criteria were chosen: 1) the terms must appear in the title; 2) they must have been published within the last two years; 3) they cannot be repeated; 4) they must be freely accessible; 5) they should pass blind peer review. The conclusion criteria adopted were: 1) dissertations and theses; 2) papers; 3) repeated journal articles; 4) they were not a research theme. The last step was to read the articles in full, according to Figure 1.

RESULTS

After the data research, twenty-six articles were selected and read. Data collection consisted of identifying the following information: (i) reference (author, article title, year of publication and published journal); (ii) purpose of the study (iii) nature of the article; (iv) location where the research was carried out. Chart 1 shows this information.

Chart 1 shows that studies produced on five continents were located: North America, South America, Asia, Europe and Africa. Asia produced the most studies about COVID-19 and police activity, with a total of ten, most of them produced in India and China. Dai *et al* (2021) highlighted how lockdown impacted the quantity and the nature of calls to the emergency number in China, pointing out that the overall number of calls decreased, but complaints about domestic violence increased significantly at the beginning of the quarantine. In analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sleep cycle of police officers, and the potential of the pandemic as a stressor, Dey *et al*, (2021), Khadse *et al* (2021), and Jiang (2021) identified that it has negative consequences on the mental health of police officers.

Seven studies were produced in Europe. Raciborski *et al* (2020) tried to look into the level of police familiarity with prevention methods and infection forms of the virus, and verified that officers had great knowledge of prevention methods and ways of becoming sick, although 25% of the respondents did not observe the social distancing policy and the mask wearing order during the interview. In their turn, Gujski *et al* (2020) carried out a study in Poland to determine the prevalence of current and past SARS-CoV- 2 infections in Polish police officers. The results pointed to the absence of infection by the virus and a very low rate of police officers who had antibodies against SARS-CoV-2.

In Macedonia, Ristevska-Dimitrovska and Batic (2020) investigated health workers, and police officers who were on the front line during the pandemic, the prevalence of psychological problems and their resilience level, and compared the results with those of the general population. Data analysis revealed that Macedonian police officers did not have psychological problems caused by the pandemic, which is the opposite result of other studies (DEY *et al*, 2021; KHADSE *et al*, 2020; and JIANG, 2021), and they had a huge capacity for resilience when compared to other health professionals and the population in general.

In North America, especially in the United States, four studies were found, three of which are theoretical, with just one being empirical. Ashby (2021) observed a decrease in the number of calls to the American police emergency number. In line with Dey *et al* (2021) in China, they found that calls asking for police assistance for domestic violence increased significantly during the lockdown, while emergency calls generally decreased. Jones (2020) and White and Fradella (2020) analyzed the role of the police in ensuring American citizens' compliance with health measures and the blocking order, in which the legitimacy of the police vis-à-vis the community, and the leadership of community leaders have a fundamental role to play in ensuring the safety of the population.

Only three studies were found in South America, two of these in Brazil and the other in Peru. Among the main findings, the notes made by Alcadipani *et al* (2020) and Matarazzo *et al* (2020) stand out, which indicate the necessity to reorganize the role of the police in the Brazilian pandemic scenario, showing that political conflicts, occupational culture and a shortage of materials in the force have a direct impact on the effectiveness of police actions. The authors also highlighted the importance of police having a humanitarian role, in contrast to the "war against crime" discourse that is widespread in police institutions. Hernández-Vásquez and Azañedo (2020) point out the need for the Peruvian government to adopt protection measures to avoid police contamination, due to the large number of deaths of these professionals in the early months of the pandemic.

Just two studies were found in Africa considering the police and COVID-19, both of them in Nigeria. Okon *et al* (2021) evaluated the knowledge and perceptions of the risk of contamination by SARS-CoV-2 in a group of Nigerian police officers. Their results revealed great expertise with regard to prevention policies and ways of becoming contaminated, but police officers tend not to adhere to preventive practices against this infection. Aborisade (2021) investigated the illegal use of force by Nigerian police in enforcing blockade orders and preventive measures of contagion, and found several issues in law enforcement by police officers, revealing abuse of authority and the sexual assault of citizens. The author also highlights the absence of police legitimacy in the community, suggesting that this fact was caused by a long period of rule by a military regime in Nigeria.

Of the twenty-six selected studies, eight of them are theoretical and eighteen are empirical. In the theoretical studies Stogner *et al* (2020), Garbarino *et al* (2021) and Hernández-Vásquez & Azañedo (2020) reflected on the need of institutions to develop accommodation programs to preserve mental health, and to decrease psychological impacts in police officers. The authors point out that the activities performed by police officers are as important as those performed by healthcare professionals, whose actions are essential for facing up to the pandemic. These notes are also present in Boovaragasamy *et al* (2021), Frenkel *et al* (2021), Yuan *et al* (2020) and Grover's (2020) empirical studies, which reinforce the necessity of having a special view of police officers, since their activities are themselves marked by stressors, which when associated with demands generated by the pandemic may lead to the emergence of depression, anxiety, sleep loss, and suicide among officers.

DISCUSSION

In general terms, the results revealed a problem that is little discussed in literature about the police profession. These theoretical and empirical studies, which investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on police activities, indicate the vulnerabilities that these professionals are exposed to in their daily routines. These vulnerabilities, however, increased in the face of the threats generated by the virus. Police officers' fragility, as evidenced in the studies we reviewed, confirms the need for actions to protect police officers' mental health when they are faced with the challenge of ensuring health protection measures, and the safety of society in general.

We observed that concern with officers during the pandemic was an object of interest of studies published in different countries, and we detected no prevalence of studies in either developed or underdeveloped countries.

For example, Indian studies pointed out that the country, which is considered to be a developing one, informed of massive changes in the duties of police officers, who became the guarantors of the lockdown imposed by the Indian government. This led to changes in sleep patterns, the development of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, and possible long term impacts on the professional and private lives of police officers (DEY *et al*, 2021; KHADSE *et al*, 2020; BOOVARAGASAMY *et al*, 2021), as also found by studies produced in developed countries in Europe, for example (RACIBORSKI *et al*, 2020; FRENKEL *et al*, 2021; GARBARINO *et al*, 2021).

The studies that involved police officers' mental health indicated the need for actions and projects for preserving mental health (DEY *et al*, 2021; FRENKEL *et al*, 2020; ALARCÓN-ZAYAS and BOUHABEN, 2021; GARBARINO *et al*, 2021; STOGNER *et al*, 2020; RACIBORSKI *et al*, 2020; GROVER *et al*, 2020; DIMITROVSKA and BATIC, 2020; HUANG *et al*, 2021; YUAN *et al*, 2020; BOOVARAGASAMY *et al*, 2021; HERNÁNDEZ-VÁSQUEZ, and AZAÑEDO, 2020). The importance of this was pointed out by the study of Jiang (2021), who examined the relationship between the psychological support received from the police corporation and the officer's response to stress. The study indicated that the institution's psychological support must be established as a standard of service provided to police officers because this increases a positive response to the stress they suffer in times of pandemic.

Most of the studies were empirical, but there were also some theoretical ones. This shows that these studies complement and reaffirm the data and the conclusions reached by others. The profession of police officer is potentially stressful due to its lack of predetermined labor hours, the need to maintain public order, and the fight against crime (HUANG *et al*, 2021; HERNÁNDEZ-VÁSQUEZ and AZAÑEDO, 2020). But during the pandemic the police needed to carry out actions that are not found in their normal daily lives, such as providing guidance and raising the awareness of the population of the importance of wearing masks, and using hand sanitizer, while avoiding approaching and arresting people for petty crimes (JONES, 2020), all of which had an impact on the daily life of the police institution.

On the other hand, in addition to being more exposed to virus infection, police officers suffered an increase in their stress and anxiety levels, had to guarantee the lockdown orders, control crowds and escort ambulances. The fact is that with these new functions a discussion has arisen about police legitimacy, that is, whether police actions are seen as legitimate by citizens. Jones (2020) points to the need to incorporate the application of procedural justice in police actions, especially in the poorest communities, and in most cases this conflicts with recognition of the legitimacy of the conduct of the police.

Jones (2020) and White and Fradella (2020) theoretically present the same foundation of the empirical study developed by Aborisade (2021), which emphasizes the importance of the role of the police in preventing the spread of Coronavirus, as well as the need for applying procedural justice in all their actions, thereby ensuring their decisions are fair and humanitarian. Aborisade (2021) points out that the imposition of force, fear, and authoritarianism does not solve problems of police legitimacy; on the contrary, they will only increase tensions between the community and state agents. But the author also points out that the pandemic has allowed the police to reinvent themselves, which has resulted in benefits by way of positive interactions with society, which have facilitated compliance with the health guidelines and restrictions that the police aim to guarantee.

Alcadipani *et al* (2020) also alert to the fact that maintaining the understanding the police have of their role, like the “war against crime” and adopting military positions, can result in a worse relationship with the community, thus harming and possibly destroying its view of the legitimacy of the police. An example of this was reported by Aborisade (2021), who demonstrated the lack of application of procedural justice by the Nigerian police, which led to abuses during the lockdown in the country, reports of sexual abuse, bribes and different treatment for poor and rich communities. On the other hand, the application of procedural justice positively reinforces the police institution’s image, as reported by López-García (2020) in Spain, where even with complaints of possible excesses by the Spanish police, the majority of the population legitimized the police officers’ actions, because they understood their importance and the need for them.

Matarazzo *et al* (2020) and Alcadipani *et al* (2020) suggest the need to think of the police as a community and non-militarized [*the police in Brazil is a branch of the military*], but non-militarization does not imply the absence of weaponry and training, but a focus on humanitarian education and community approach techniques. Matarazzo *et al* (2020) also point out the need to review three dimensions in police institutions: the occupational culture (where male chauvinism is widespread); policy (which generates conflicts between authorities and hinders leadership and practices for preventing the spread of the disease) and; material (the absence of PPE and minimum working conditions).

Therefore, given the results, it was found that such an institutional change will possibly be of more benefit than harm to the institution. There is a need, however, for articulation and cultural change in the police, so that they understand their “new” role, and are able to perform it more effectively and be accepted by the community. This is also of benefit to the police themselves, who may feel more comfortable taking care of their psychological and physical health, and there may possibly be more positive responses in the daily life of the profession.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was achieved, since it was possible, within the methodological limitations imposed, to present the main results of studies that focused on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on police activity, analyzing the main contributions and those places where the studies were undertaken. After analyzing the results, we found that there is a lack of academic production studying these impacts on police forces, but there were important contributions that draw attention to the need to prioritize mental health and redefine the attributions of the police in society.

Among the main limitations are the fact that few studies focus on the object being analyzed, and there is little information about the quality of the journals. The absence of Brazilian studies should also be mentioned, because this generated difficulties when it came to comparing the realities of other countries with the Brazilian reality.

Finally, there is a need for more research that focuses on the impacts of the pandemic on police activity, in the same proportion as the investigations carried out on the impacts of the pandemic on healthcare professionals, since, as well as being important, the police play a fundamental role at the forefront of confronting the COVID-19 pandemic.

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