

Original Research

Nurses' Experiences with Work and Family Conflict During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic impacts all aspects of life and all fields of the profession, including nurses, where this can affect physical and psychological health, which impacts the emergence of various new problems, including work and family conflicts. This study aims to explore work and family conflicts experienced by nurses during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to get an in-depth picture of the experiences of nurses who experience conflict at work and conflict in the family during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data were collected using in-depth interviews with 12 participants who were taken using the purposive sampling technique. Participants were female and male nurses who work in isolation and non-isolation rooms. Data analysis was carried out thematically inductively through six stages, namely data introduction, code identification, determining the initial theme, reviewing the theme, defining and naming the theme, and the last step is to making a report. The results showed that five themes were identified, namely, (1) role conflict, (2) conflict with family and the surrounding environment, (3) heavy role demands, (4) accepting and undergoing multiple roles, and (5) support in carrying out multiple roles. With the discovery of several new conflicts due to the Covid-19 pandemic, both conflicts at work and conflicts in the family, it is essential for a nurse to adapt to stay balanced in carrying out obligations both as someone professional in their field and as a housewife.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has an impact on all aspects of life and all fields of the profession, in this case, nursing is one of the professions where human resources, namely nurses, work hard to provide nursing care services to patients directly so that there is a high risk of exposure to virus transmission and is likely to transmit the virus to family members. Currently, the nurse's work system uses the shift method, where this method can largely affect the pattern of life and the implementation of the roles it has so that it can trigger various kinds of conflicts such as conflicts in family life and in work. Asiedu *et al.* (2018) describes the methods and long working hours of nurses can cause conflicts that occur in the family, so it is very necessary to regulate the hours and work methods of nurses. In addition, Wohrmann (2020) adds that someone who works using the shift method and often works on weekends can be at high risk of experiencing conflict both in the family and at work.

When viewed from the behavioral aspect, conflict is an interactive form that occurs at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, or organizational levels. Conflicts that occur, especially at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, are closely related to increased pressure on various role demands, which can cause adverse effects and, if not managed properly, can affect family life and carrying out their work. Jamaluddin (2019) found that work and family conflicts can trigger a decrease in the performance of a nurse. In line with Jamaluddin (2019), research by Yanti & Yudhaningsih (2021) also states that work and family conflicts impact nurse performance. This is further reinforced by Siswadi *et al.* (2021) that nurses who have work and family conflicts experience decreased performance. Based on the description above, it can be seen that one of the impacts of the conflict experienced can affect the quality of the services provided by a nurse.

Work and family conflicts can be experienced by both male and female nurses, who are also at risk of causing physical and psychological health problems. This situation is exacerbated by the increasing number of

Covid-19 patients, which causes nurses to experience physical exhaustion, fear of contracting and transmitting viruses, anxiety, insomnia, and decreased endurance (Zurlo, 2019). Insan (2019) also stated that conflicts that occur can cause nurses to experience physical and psychological pressure. Lai *et al.* (2020) explained that where most nurses were afraid of contracting the virus and worried about transmitting the virus to family members, so this can increase the burden on a nurse and can interfere with the performance, physical and psychological health of nurses.

When a person experiences various kinds of conflict, an effort is needed to manage the conflict. One of them is by carrying out conflict management, where this action can be done by developing strategies carried out by the parties experiencing the conflict to get the desired resolution. This way of handling conflict in conflict management is usually done constructively and brings the conflicting parties into a cooperative process and can design a practical cooperative system to manage differences constructively, which in turn can limit the negative aspects and even increase the positive aspects of the conflict.

This is evidenced by the results of Chen *et al.* (2021) research involving nurses in China; it was found that most nurses during the pandemic experienced various kinds of conflicts, including work and family conflicts, so nursing manager support was needed in managing these conflicts.

In line with the nursing theory proposed by Roy with the assumption that humans are complex biopsychosocial creatures and always interact with the environment in the face of various stimuli, both internal and external, that can cause conflict. Nurses are no exception; during the current pandemic, there are additional roles that must be completed at the same time so that it is not uncommon to cause conflicts between roles. In order to overcome this conflict, a coping mechanism is needed so that an adaptive response is produced in carrying out its roles and functions optimally and can provide professional nursing care (Alligood, 2014).

A preliminary study was conducted on four nurses and found that all nurses said that the types of conflicts that occurred before the pandemic were less experienced: intrapersonal conflict and interpersonal conflict caused by the inability to manage the time between the demands of work and their role in the family. They stated the method used to resolve the conflict by regulating the time division between work and taking care of the family. However, this later impacted new problems, which as disharmony in relationships among friends at work. Participants also said that in dealing with conflicts, they received support from the workplace, but that support had to be adjusted again to the situation and conditions that occurred in the workplace.

At the time of the pandemic, the conflicts experienced increased, namely interpersonal conflicts, intrapersonal conflicts, and intra-group conflicts caused by concerns about transmitting the virus to family members, relationships with family members became less harmonious, and the inability to manage the time between work demands and their role in the family and the emergence of The new problem is disharmony between friends at work. Participants also said that in dealing with conflicts, they received support from the workplace, but that support had to be adjusted again to the situation and conditions that occurred in the workplace. And the method used to resolve the conflict is by trying to manage oneself and think positively about the situations and conditions at hand, as well as managing the time between work and taking care of the family, but with the increasing workload during the pandemic, conflicts cannot be resolved optimally. Most of the participants said that they did not get support from their families in dealing with conflicts and that the support from the workplace was not optimal. The purpose of this study is to explore work and family conflicts experienced by nurses during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Method

This research design used a qualitative research method with a descriptive phenomenological approach that emphasizes the nurses' experiences of work and family conflicts experienced during the Covid-19

pandemic to obtain an in-depth picture and understanding of nurses' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. These experiences can be different and unique following the things experienced by participants, which are described in the form of themes.

The participants used in this study were nurses on duty at the hospital in September 2021, with 12 people, using purposive sampling method, with the inclusion criteria of nurses who served in the hospital where the research was conducted, willing to participate in study, and have experience in treating patients with confirmed Covid-19. The following are the specifications of all participants: P1, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P12 are female, married, age range 27-40 years, have school-age children, education level S1 and DIII Nursing, work in the Covid isolation room -19 and non-isolated, have a husband who also works. P2, P3, P8 are female, unmarried, age range 27-34 years old, education level S1 in nursing, work in the isolation room, live with parents. P4, P11, male, unmarried, age range 27-37 years, education level S1 and DIII nursing, work in Covid-19 and non-isolation isolation rooms, lives with parents.

The research ethics committee of the Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, University of Muhammadiyah Banjarmasin has given ethical approval prior to the start of the research. The ethical approval for this study was approval letter No. 195.UMB/KE/VIII/2021. In addition, the researchers also obtained informed consent from all participants before starting data collection. Researchers maintain privacy, protect anonymity, maintain confidentiality and assure participants that all data collected will be kept confidential and their anonymity will be guaranteed. Data collection was carried out directly by the researcher by conducting in-depth interviews with participants using tools in the form of interview guides, field notes and tape recordings while still implementing health protocols. The questions given are in the form of open-ended questions. The things that were raised by the participants were listened to carefully to get maximum information by exploring the experiences, perceptions and thoughts of the participants. The duration of time for data collection for each participant is

between 45 minutes to 100 minutes. Data analysis in this study used the Colaizzi method, where the data obtained were analyzed inductively (inductive thematic analysis) which was used to identify and analyze the themes generated in this study systematically.

Results and Discussion

This study resulted in five themes, namely role conflict, family conflict and the surrounding environment, heavy role demands, accepting and undergoing multiple roles, and support in carrying out multiple roles.

Role conflict

Role conflict is a conflict that occurs because there is a clash when someone is carrying out certain roles at the same time. This depends on how the person is able to control the conflict that occurs. If the conflict cannot be controlled, it will result in negative things that can cause pressure on a person so that there is an inability to carry out the role. But if the conflict can be controlled properly then the conflict can also cause positive things that trigger a person to be more productive so as to improve the function of the implementation of the role they have.

In this study, there were 2 types of conflict, namely intrapersonal conflict and interpersonal conflict. These two types of conflict can happen to anyone, including nurses. Intrapersonal conflict can occur in someone who experiences a situation where he has to make a choice between two or more alternatives. Agustian (2015) in his research found that many nurses experience intrapersonal conflicts because they are faced with the choice of completing work and caring for families at the same time. The results of this study are in line with the description above that many nurses experience intrapersonal conflicts such as worries that are felt within themselves because they are not optimal in carrying out their daily roles. One of the causes is the Covid-19 pandemic where nurses have additional roles both at work and in the family. As stated by the participant's expressions:

P5 "...stress dividing time with children's school and we work continuously..." similarly stated by other participants. "

P7 "...I am worried and sad that it is not optimal to be a mother..."

In addition to intrapersonal conflict, nurses are also at risk of experiencing interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict occurs between two or more people, where the two people have different values, goals and beliefs. This conflict often occurs because a person is constantly interacting with other people so that there are differences. The results of this study also prove that male and female nurses experience interpersonal conflicts such as not optimally carrying out their roles as housewives, wives and caring for parents during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participant's expressions about this included:

P1 "...my husband doesn't support me either... always gets angry, husband says later what will happen to the children, how is this...how is it..." Another participant said

P6 "...children often protest because during the pandemic they are rarely accompanied studying... so my mind burden..."

Komalasari (2020) explained that nurses who work during the pandemic experience a lot of role conflicts. The role conflict in question is in addition to acting as a nurse who works with an increased workload and, higher responsibilities, longer service time due to the increasing number of patients being treated but not proportional to the number of available nurses. In addition to their role as a nurse, participants also have an important role in the family where this role must also be carried out with more responsibility and not less time.

Weken *et al.* (2020) stated that where role conflicts are mostly caused by other responsibilities, it must be resolved at one time. The current role is an additional role obtained during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as accompanying and helping children during the online learning process. In addition, research in Norway by Aperribai *et al.* (2020) also stated the same thing, namely that many working participants experienced role conflict because they had to carry out one role simultaneously with several other roles.

Family and environmental conflicts

Conflict can occur anywhere and to anyone, including in the family and the surrounding environment. Especially during

the Covid-19 pandemic, there are many things that can cause conflict, such as longer working hours so that there is less time to be together and take care of the family, the risk of working in a hospital during the Covid-19 pandemic can cause conflict in the family, and is considered to have the potential to transmit the virus to other family members and the closest people and the surrounding environment. This is similar to what was said by the participant:

P9“...husband protested because he had little time at home with his family..”

P8“...mother was asked to move to the office...”

P11“...do you think you brought the virus into the house...”

P12“...when you see me from afar, the neighbor immediately covers his nose and mouth with his hand, even though I came wearing a mask, neighbors always seem to be avoiding each other when they pass ...”

The nursing profession is one of the professions that is prone to conflict, where the resources owned by profession, one of which is nurses, often have difficulty carrying out the roles they have both in their roles in the family and at work. The conflict experienced by nurses in their families is one of the forms of inter role conflict or an imbalance of roles at work with roles in the family. This usually occurs when a person tries to fulfill the above roles simultaneously but cannot complete them. Nursing jobs are stressful and challenging jobs that can cause difficulties in balancing work and family life roles. Nurses who experience conflict between work and family can experience high pressure so that they are at risk of decreased performance and often feel overpowered by work which results in the inability to fulfill responsibilities in their family.

Conflicts in the family can also occur because of problems with husbands, parents, and close family. Conflicts in the family can also occur because of problems with husbands, parents, and close family. This is in line with what was stated by participant:

P4“...accused of carrying the virus by his family...”

P6“...fighting with his father because he didn't have enough time to take care of the children...”. Another participant also expressed the same thing, namely.

P9“...often bickering with my husband, confused about taking care of the household, children's school, all kinds of things...”...tired, tired of arguing with her husband, ...taking care of children while working, not to mention taking care of others...”

Ekici *et al.* (2017) described that nurses who work with a shift system have high conflicts with their husbands and parents where long official shifts cause a lack of time to carry out roles in the family, coupled with a lack of support at work in terms of setting office hours. Thus causing a high workload resulting in nurses having difficulty balancing roles in work with roles and responsibilities towards the family, resulting in a decrease in performance and quality of services provided.

The same thing was also expressed by Cahyadi *et al.* (2021) that conflicts that occur at work and family have a negative impact on nurses who have multiple roles, so their performance is not optimal. The same thing was expressed by Pohan (2021), who stated that conflicts with husbands and parents caused conflicts at work. In this study, the same results were obtained, namely that participants experienced conflicts with their husbands and close family that occurred due to a lack of time to care for their families and were accused of transmitting the virus to family members, while conflicts with the surrounding environment, namely people around their living environment, seemed to avoid and limit interactions with participants. This is what causes conflict in the family and the surrounding environment, which results in participants being less concentrated in carrying out their roles at work. Male and female nurses who work are required to carry out their work to the maximum; this can cause conflict with the family. In this position, the nurse must be able to carry out responsibilities as well as possible so that it will reduce the occurrence of conflict in the family. Problems in the family often lead to conflict, which is actually a conflict that does not stand alone, but there is a relationship that cannot be separated from other problems.

Heavy role demands

Every job will cause workers to encounter certain situations that expose them to the

demands of the role so that it makes a person experience pressure in his work. Job demands are a perceptual process that is individual. In general, a person will experience job demands due to pressure from individuals, groups, and managers. This work pressure will have an impact on the behavior, cognitive and physiological workers. The work pressure felt by individuals can come from role conflict, role overload, and big responsibilities that are imposed.

Agustina (2018) report that many nurses complain of impaired concentration at work due to having multiple roles, causing complaints such as fatigue and divided thoughts between family and work matters. Nurses often come late because they have to take care of their children and husband first. Nurses often get reprimands from the leadership because family matters disrupt their work. This illustrates that nurses experience heavy role demands in work and family life at the same time. In the work environment, a nurse is required to be able to work well. Meanwhile, in the family environment, they are also required to be able to carry out their roles. Because of the dual role demands, nurses can experience heavy role demands. In this study, in addition to a high workload, multiple roles can also lead to heavy role demands. If someone has two or more roles that are carried out at one time, that person can be categorized as an individual who has multiple roles. Everyone can have a dual role without the exception of nurses, and with the many roles and responsibilities carried out by nurses, if they are not balanced properly, it can affect the work they do. This is evidenced by the participant's expression:

P2 "...stressed because they have to be faced with working procedures using complete personal protective equipment in layers..."

another participant said

P9 "...higher workload fatigue..."

Wardani (2019) show that many participants find it difficult during this COVID-19 pandemic with the additional role of being a companion for children who are studying at home. There is difficulty in dividing the time because the children's study hours are the same as the participants' working hours. All roles must be completed correctly and in a

balanced manner; otherwise, it will cause pressure within yourself which can also affect other roles. The same thing was also found in this study, which was revealed by the participants

P1 "...already tired with the condition that divides the mind between family and work..."

Another participant also revealed

P3 "...the more work comes home, the later it becomes difficult to divide the time between work and taking care of parents..."

The results of Wardani's research (2019) are a new challenge for nurses who must be managed properly. Because, in reality, there are many nurses who have difficulty carrying out all their roles during this pandemic.

Accept and carry out multiple roles

When someone experiences a problem physiologically, that person will try to find solutions, where the way of solving the problem can be positive or negative. A person will go through a process in solving the problem; the process includes the first, namely the person will try to understand the problem he is facing, then proceed with the second stage, namely making a plan to solve the problem, and the last stage the person will undergo the right choice of solving the problem at hand.

Octaviani (2019), reports that participants who experience problems will go through the process of solving the problem so that they can accept and undergo the chosen problem-solving method. In line with the findings above, this study also obtained the same results; namely, all participants who experienced work and family conflicts during the Covid-19 pandemic went through several processes to solve the problem; these processes included participants thinking about and understanding the problems they are currently experiencing such as self-reflect, calm down, think about and understand the problems experienced. As expressed by the participants:

P1 "...self-reflection to relax the mind...",

P2 "...calm yourself must be calm to face problems, be professional at work..."

Furthermore, participants will look for options for problem-solving where the method used describes positive ways such as communicating with family, praying, time

management and doing activities that are useful for refreshing the mind. In addition to the positive method, there were some participants who used negative methods, such as spending time in a way that was not recommended during the Covid-19 pandemic, cutting off interactions with other people, and being very introverted due to excessive anxiety, which resulted in not being able to carry out other role functions optimally. The next process is that all participants carry out a choice of problem-solving methods to accept and carry out their roles in everyday life. The participants also expressed this in this study:

P10 "...if I have a holiday outside the city, I visit the family's place, so if I gather, I take my mask off to eat..."

P11 "...quarantine myself. I am very worried that my parents will catch Covid."

Acceptance of the role of self can be achieved if the aspects contained in a person are in a condition or state of balance with the actual situation and the desired state. A person will feel freedom from anxiety, guilt, fear, and withdrawal from social interactions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The above description is reinforced by Monty *et al.* (2003), which also state that individuals who successfully go through the stages of the problem-solving process will be able to undergo multiple roles that must be fulfilled in everyday life.

In line with the description, Roy revealed that humans are an adaptive system that can carry out certain roles and can explore the beliefs and values of individuals. Roy also argues that a nurse has the ability of humanism, which is the ability to maintain and adapt to the stressors faced in order to maintain health so that they can carry out their own roles.

The main concern of this concept is that nurses as humans are an adaptive system consisting of a unified whole, and in the face of conflicts that can interfere with their role, nurses will try to find ways to solve problems by passing mechanisms to achieve an adaptive state. The process includes input, control, and output. Inputs are all stimuli in the form of pressure and other things as well as direct or indirect factors of belief and understanding of nurses, where the choice of ways to solve problems can be positive or negative towards nurses, which causes an immediate response.

Furthermore, there is a control process where a coping setting against the stimulus (pressure) being faced.

The end result of this process is an output that is described by an adaptive response from the individual in the form of an adaptive or ineffective response. So it can be concluded that if the participant can respond adaptively in solving the problem, then the existing stimulus (pressure) can be handled properly so that multiple roles can be carried out without any problems, but on the contrary, if the participant's response is ineffective then the multi-role that will be implemented cannot be carried out optimally.

During the current pandemic, where nurses are one of the health workers who play an important role in handling patients who are confirmed positive for Covid-19, this requires nurses to be able to adapt to the situation. Self-adaptation in dealing with each role can often cause a nurse to experience physical and psychological pressure.

In this study, there were several stimuli that caused conflict between roles, including focal stimuli, namely stimuli that directly occurred to nurses, which caused an immediate response to the stimulus, thus affecting the range of health and illness. In this case, the focal stimulus is that there are intrapersonal conflicts and interpersonal conflicts that cause participants to experience a lot of pressure in family life and in carrying out work as a nurse, resulting in not being optimal in carrying out inter-role functions properly. In addition, there are also other stimuli that cause conflict, namely contextual stimuli, where this stimulus is another stimulus that can exacerbate the conflict experienced, both internal and external so that it can influence participants in carrying out multiple roles. This contextual stimulus includes the absence of support from family, institutions, society, and government.

The inter-role conflict experienced by the participants in this study was exacerbated by the presence of residual stimuli in the form of participants' beliefs and understandings that could lead to focal stimuli, such as the belief that gathering with extended family would not have a negative impact on health, but this was not done with a positive process. In a pandemic situation, where at that time, the number of

cases of Covid-19 was increasing, it exacerbated intrapersonal conflicts and interpersonal conflicts. In addition, some participants believed that by staying silent for a while, they could reduce the conflicts they faced with their husbands and extended families, even though when conflicts occur, good communication is needed and must provide understanding to their husbands and extended families that there are other roles that must be carried out in conjunction with the role of the husband and family.

In order to reduce the three stimuli that cause conflict between roles in participants in this study, a coping mechanism is needed in order to adapt to the stimulus faced. The mechanism that occurs between the regulator and cognate mechanisms. Regulatory mechanisms that occur are in the form of physiological responses that occur to body responses related to the nervous system and endocrine organs as well as the upper and lower motor nervous systems such as when experiencing conflict, some participants share stories with colleagues and family, trying to keep doing the best possible activities. , increase the intake of nutrients, food supplements, fluids, and electrolytes to increase the body's immunity. In addition, there are also other mechanisms, namely the cognate mechanism in the form of a cognate subsystem mechanism originating from internal and external stimuli where this mechanism has a relationship in processes that occur in brain functions such as processing information, and emotions, and making choices. In this study, the cognate mechanisms that occur include seeking information about how to treat patients with confirmed Covid-19 and preventing the spread of the virus, strengthening psychological aspects before providing nursing care services, and participants also trying to carry out their multiple roles as well as possible.

The final result of the coping mechanism carried out by the participants in this study showed the participants' ability to make adjustments and adapt to stimuli that come from the internal environment, such as physical and psychological unpreparedness, or stimuli from the external environment, such as pressure and demands of work and family. This

shows the adaptive response of participants in dealing with inter-role conflicts, namely conflicts in carrying out their roles in the family and their roles in carrying out work as a nurse.

Support in multi-role

Support is needed by everyone, where support itself is an effort given to someone; it can be in the form of moral or material to motivate others to resolve various kinds of conflicts. Putra and Susilawati (2018), in the results of their research, described that nurses as one of the health workers are significantly at risk and are vulnerable to experiencing pressure both physically and psychologically, so they really need support in carrying out their roles.

The results of this study also found that all participants had many roles and responsibilities, so they really needed support in the form of emotional support, instrumental support, information support, and appreciation support in carrying out their role functions. When a nurse experiences pressure on psychological aspects that can cause discomfort and even emotional disturbances, support is needed in the form of emotional support, such as feeling comfortable, feeling loved in the form of enthusiasm and empathy that can be obtained through interaction with family and colleagues. In addition to emotional support, instrumental support is also needed in the form of direct and tangible assistance, such as giving or helping to relieve the task of colleagues who are under pressure. No less important, information support also plays a very important role in the problem-solving process faced by information support can be provided by providing an explanation of the situation and everything related to the problems being faced by the participants. This is as expressed by the participants:

P1 "*...we strengthen each other...*",

P3 "*...replace friends who are tired...*",

P10 "*...we get training from the infection prevention and control team and the latest information is always routinely provided by the infection prevention and control team...*"

The description above is reinforced by Indra (2018), where the form of support that can be given to someone who is experiencing fatigue, pressure, and stress is the form of

emotional support and instrumental support. It is also reinforced by Putra and Muttaqin (2020), who reveal that social support is essential to be given to individuals who experience a lot of pressure so that they can increase their enthusiasm for living life. Zhang *et al.* (2021) also added the importance of emotional and instrumental support for nurses who directly interacted to provide nursing care to Covid-19 patients. The same thing was also expressed by Thania *et al.* (2021), who also stated that someone who worked during a pandemic in carrying out their role really needed support from the environment and family. Nurses who have support from various sources will have more value so that they can carry out various roles and can carry out their responsibilities to family and work effectively. Sources of support for nurses can be obtained from colleagues, the government, husbands, and parents. Mo *et al.* (2020) stated that support from various sources can reduce the pressure felt by nurses.

In this study, all participants who carried out nursing care during the Covid-19 pandemic received support from various sources, namely colleagues, husbands, parents, and the government. Based on the description above, it can be seen that the support that comes from various sources, such as personal support from husbands, parents, and colleagues greatly affects the ability of nurses to carry out all their roles. No less important is the support that comes from the government is also very supportive of the successful implementation of the multi-role of nurses. As expressed by the participants, P8 "...roommates who support each other...", P4 "...we also support each other in the room..." No less important is the support that comes from the government is also very supportive of the successful implementation of multi-role nurses. Participants said:

P5 "...the friends in the room support each other..."

P11 "...It's good to get the government's attention to get incentives."

P2 "...parents always support me..."

Conclusion

This study found a variety of new conflicts experienced by nurses during the Covid-19 pandemic, both conflicts that occurred at work

and conflicts that occurred in the family, which consisted of 5 findings: role conflict; family conflict and the surrounding environment; heavy role demands; accepting and undergoing multi roles; and support in carrying out multi roles thus the ability to adapt is very needed to resolve the various conflicts.

Limitations of the study

The study's limitations include the small number of male participants and the absence of inquiry about the consequences of various jobs throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

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