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COVID-19 and gambling: Lessons learned from self-report surveys and objective clinical data

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Why suspect a change in gambling during COVID-19?

- **Migration from land-based/sports gambling to other gambling?**
- **Physical restrictions: change in everyday habits, less treatment/support**
- **Financial crisis – unemployment, psychological distress**

COMMENTARY

OPEN

Gambling During the COVID-19 Crisis – A Cause for Concern

Anders Håkansson, PhD, Fernando Fernández-Aranda, PhD, FAED, Jose M. Menchón, MD, PhD, Marc N. Potenza, MD, PhD, and Susana Jiménez-Murcia, PhD


The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to worsen mental health problems in the general population, including increasing engagement in addictive behaviors. Here, we describe observations suggesting that the current crisis and its sequelae may worsen problem gam-

(J Addict Med 2020;14: e10–e12)

Fear of disease, lost lives of close relatives and friends, or confinement and other restraints related to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis (the spread and consequences of the SARS-

Article

Changes in Gambling Behavior during the COVID-19 Pandemic—A Web Survey Study in Sweden

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First online web panel study

- Web survey, members of web panel (Userneeds, aged 18+).
- April 24-May 3, 2020.
- N=2016

Subjects reporting increase: **54% moderate-risk/problem gamblers vs 7% among others (PGSI)**

Change in gambling? (including pre-pandemic gamblers, n=1246)

- **6% increased**
- **12% decreased**
- 82% unchanged

Article

Changes of Gambling Patterns during COVID-19 in Sweden, and Potential for Preventive Policy Changes. A Second Look Nine Months into the Pandemic

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Second online web panel study

- Web survey, members of web panel (Userneeds, aged 18+).
- November 20-29, 2020
- N = 2029

Subjects reporting increase: **62% moderate-risk/problem gamblers vs 7% among others (PGSI)**

Change in gambling? (including pre-pandemic gamblers, n=1281)

- **9% increased**
- **7% decreased**
- 86% unchanged

Increase in other gambling during sports lock-down?



Article

Changes in Gambling Behavior during the COVID-19 Pandemic—A Web Survey Study in Sweden

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- Håkansson, 2020 (survey April-May, 2020)

Yes

- | | | |
|-----------------|----|------------------------------------|
| • Other sports | 2% | 82% moderate-risk/problem gamblers |
| • Horse betting | 6% | 49% |
| • Online casino | 4% | 89% |
| • Other | 5% | 52% |

No

- | | | |
|----------------|-----|-----|
| • Gambles less | 19% | 15% |
|----------------|-----|-----|

Original Paper

Changes in Self-Reported Web-Based Gambling Activity During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Cross-sectional Study

Emma Claesdotter-Knutsson¹, MD, PhD; Anders Håkansson², MD, PhD

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Third online web panel study

- Web survey, members of web panel (Ipsos, aged 18+).
- March, 2022.
- N=1501

Change in gambling? (including only pre-pandemic gamblers, n=1064)

- **10% increased**
- **7% decreased**
- 82% unchanged

- **Proportion of moderate-risk/problem gamblers (PGSI) among**
 - those reporting a self-reported *increase*: **58%**
 - those reporting a self-reported *decrease*: **17%**
 - those reporting *no change*: **9%**

Variables associated with gambling type-specific increase in gambling (multivariate logistic regression)

Self-reported *increased gambling* was associated with

- increasing level of *gambling problems* (no risk as reference)
 - low-risk gambling (OR 4.40 [2.17-8.93])
 - moderate-risk gambling (OR 12.5 [6.54-24.04])
 - problem gambling (OR 32.4 [13.77-76.35])
- moderate *psychological distress* (Kessler-6, OR 2.62 [1.39-4.91])

All gambling types: increase associated with increasing gambling problems

Only *online casino*: increase associated with *psychological distress* (OR 4.47 [1.15-17.30])

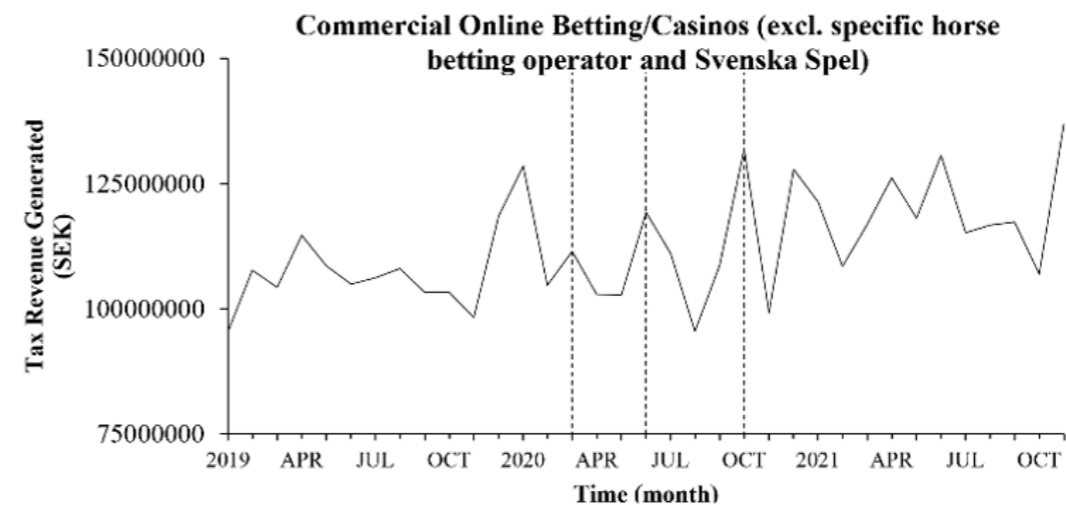
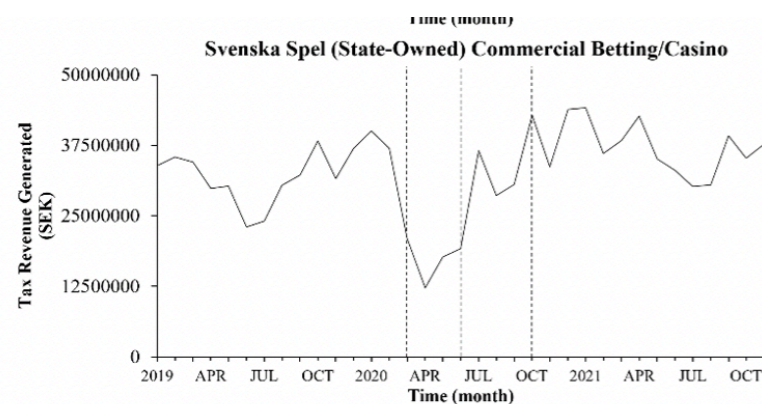
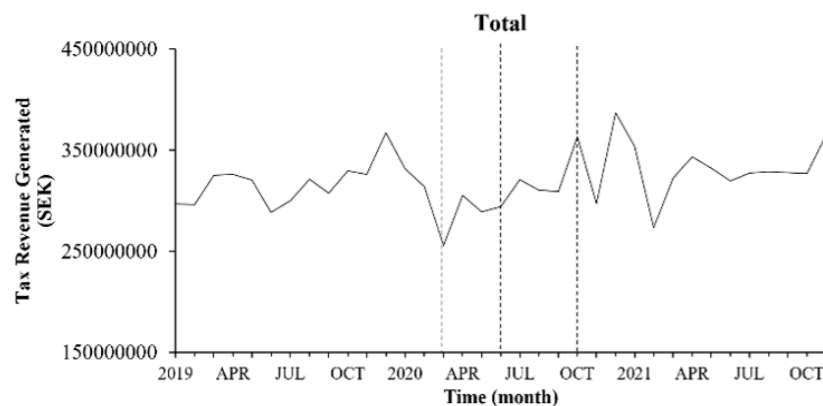
Conclusions from three web survey studies in Sweden

- **Limited sub-group report increased gambling**
- Factors independently associated with increased gambling:
 - Higher degree of **gambling problems** (April/May 2020, Nov 2020, March 2021)
 - Self-reported increase in **alcohol** (April/May 2020, Nov 2020)
 - Higher degree of **poor mental health** (Nov 2020, March 2021)
- **Online casino** only gambling type where an increase is related to **poor mental health** (studied in March 2021)
- **Very high rates of gambling problems** in sub-groups who **increased other gambling** when sports were closed down (studied in April/May 2020)

Early COVID-19 and gambling in the gambling market: Strong commercial online market in Sweden even in times of sports lockdown (and further 2020-2021)

Figure 1

Tax Revenue Generated from Gambling Vendors



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Original Research

An interrupted time series analysis of gambling behavior based on gambling operator revenue-based taxation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden



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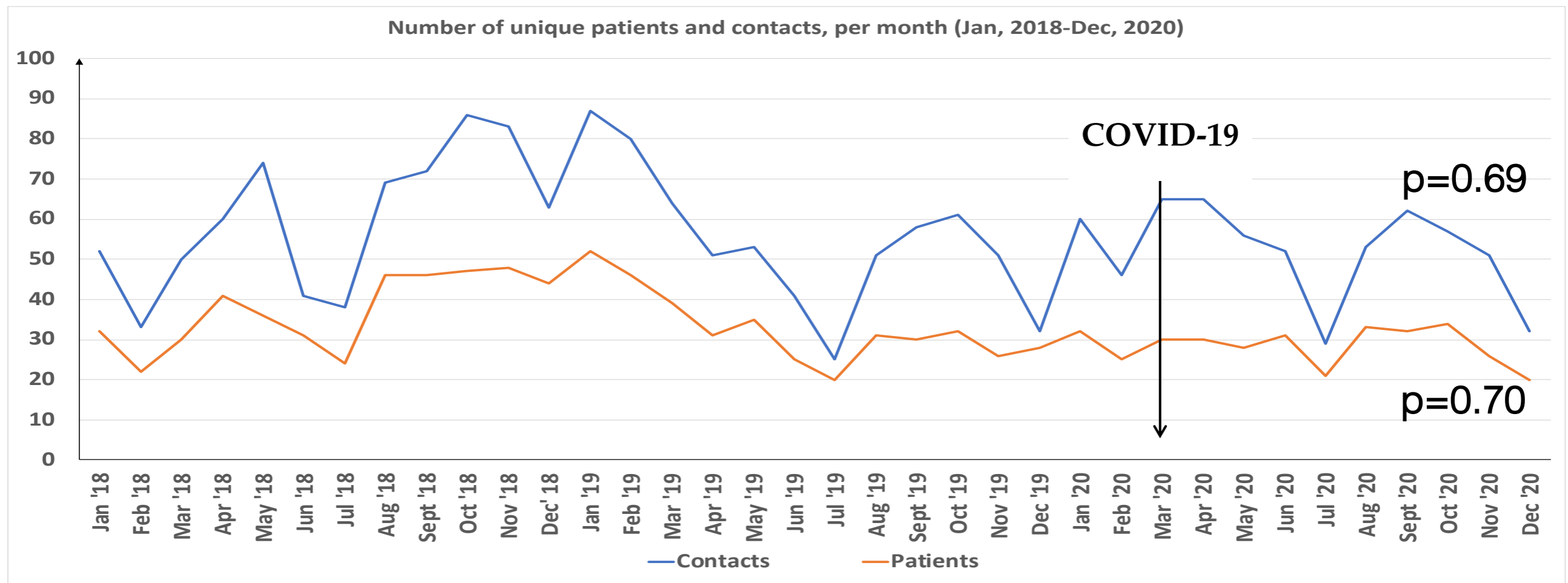
^d Nantes Université, CHU Nantes, UIC Psychiatrie et Santé Mentale Nantes, F-44000, France

Revenue-based gambling taxation in Sweden 2019-2021. Stepwise increases in commercial online gambling in the summer of 2020 and during 2nd C-19 wave in autumn 2020.

Mitchell Andersson, Marianne Balem, Anders Håkansson (2022). *Public Health*.

Early COVID-19 and gambling in the clinical setting

Treatment seeking at the regional Gambling Treatment Unit, Region Skåne, Sweden, through December, 2020

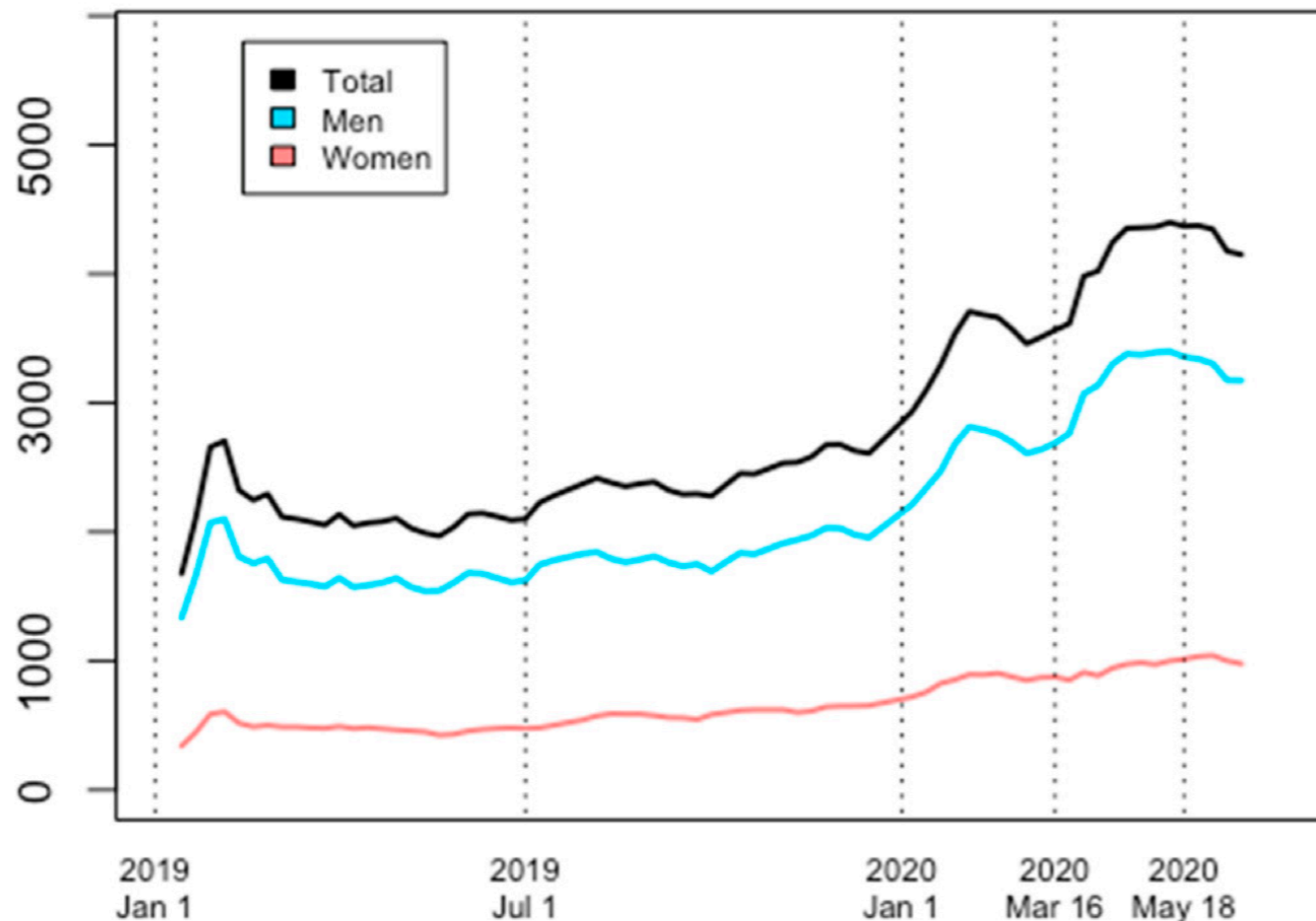


Anders Håkansson, Gunny Åkesson, Cécile Grudet, Niroshani Broman (2021).

Early COVID-19 and gambling in self-exclusion behavior:

No certain change in self-exclusion prevalence (short-term, 1 and 3 months) during first phase of COVID-19 – increases both before and during COVID-19

Total number of self-excluded, per week (1-month self-exclusion)



COVID-19-related deposit limits in online casino and electronic gambling machines (5,000 SEK/week) – the experience of Svenska Spel gamblers

JMIR FORMATIVE RESEARCH

Håkansson et al

Original Paper

Effects of a National Preventive Intervention Against Potential COVID-19–Related Gambling Problems in Online Gamblers: Self-Report Survey Study

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- 60% aware of having been limited by the regulations
- Intervention reported to be
 - very good/fairly good: 54%
 - very bad/fairly bad: 23%
 - decreasing overall gambling: 39%
 - increasing overall gambling: 8%

COVID-19 special regulations – the experience of gamblers of Svenska Spel

- Awareness of the special regulation higher in individuals with moderate-risk/problem gambling (68% vs 48%, $p < 0.001$).
- Most common gambling type reported to have increased at another operator: online casino (42% among moderate-risk/problem gamblers, 19% among others, $p < 0.001$).

COVID-19 special regulations – the experience of gamblers of Svenska Spel

- Having gambled at more than one operator after the limit: 83%
- Gambled on
 - one operator since introduction of the regulation: 13%
 - 2-4 operators: 56%
 - 5-10 operators: 21%
 - 11-14 operators: 3%
 - 15+ operators: 3%
 - not sure: 4%
- ***Increase in gambling*** after the special regulation: associated with ***moderate-risk/problem gambling***, and with ***negative attitudes*** to the regulation

A few examples of more recent international surveys studies: gambling in COVID-19 and vulnerable groups?

- Ontario, Canada, gamblers (n=940) followed twice (April and August, 2020): sub-group with ***variable gambling patterns*** during COVID-19 were more likely to have gambling problems, negative impact from the pandemic and ***depression and anxiety*** (Price, 2022)
- Web panel respondents in Finland (n=1530), link between ***mental health*** problems and ***increased gambling/gaming*** in Finland (Savolainen et al., 2022)
- German survey in gamblers (n=612) revealed low transfer from offline to online gambling – lower-frequency gamblers more likely to quit, gamblers with ***cognitive distortions*** more likely to persist (Kalke et al., 2022)
- Need for more long-term studies on changes in gambling behavior in vulnerable groups (mental health problems, gambling problems)

What do we know so far?

- ***Most people likely unaffected*** in their gambling by COVID-19
- Online surveys in Sweden: sub-groups with ***higher vulnerability*** more likely to report an increase
- When sub-groups reported increased gambling, they tended to be ***male, younger, or had gambling problems*** (systematic review, Public Health England, 2022)
- Legislation aimed for ***high-intensity gamblers*** likely address sub-groups with highly ***volatile gambling patterns***



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Questions?

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