

# Maintenance of Health & Safety of Women Garment Employees: A Study of Chittagong Asian Apparels Ltd

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**Abstract - The study was undertaken with the objective of analyzing the health and safety issues of the employees of Chittagong Asian Apparels Ltd (CAAL). Data for the study were collected both from primary and secondary source. The study reveals that the industry is the largest employer in the formal manufacturing sector where more than one thousand women employees worked. The health and safety issues included in the study are high temperature, dust, inadequate ventilation and lighting, excessive noise, shortage of fire fighting equipments, blocked exit, inadequate sanitation, unhygienic canteen, lack of pure drinking water, excess working hours, sub minimal wage and denial of wage rise. These have directly affected the health and safety of women garment employees of CAAL. The study suggested that promotional facility, promotional policy, upgrading economic situation, increased communication and ensured training facilities for various categories of staff should be increased for the effective growth of health and safety of garment employees. The study further suggests that the maternity leave with salary for the unconfirmed women employees should be given due weightage for their social and economic security.**

**Keywords:** Health, Safety, Women's, Garments, Employees.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The women in Bangladesh have contributed substantially to their households as well as to the country's economy. Though women constitute half of the population, their contribution towards economic activities has not been duly assessed. It is not possible to bring out development by keeping the womenfolk outside the remit of overall development agenda. The government has adopted a range of programs to remove the gender disparity. In the Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), emphasis was laid on women development and the plan aimed to achieve the agenda like (i) gender parity at all levels and

equal partnership in decision making; (ii) rights of women and their control on economic assets like land, capital and technology, including their economic self-reliance; (iii) removing the gap between men and women in terms of development and maximum utilization of human resources in the sphere of agriculture, industry, commerce, modern technology and informal sectors; (iv) stopping all forms of persecution on women and preventing women and children trafficking; and (v) ensuring women participation in the process of establishing peace at the national and international level. Women Development Policy (1991) was formulated with a view to ensuring active participation of women in national development activities as well as ensuring their empowerment through building them up as skilled human resources.

As per the Govt. policy, the main issue of women development is to create employment opportunities for women in both formal and informal sectors. Accordingly, women quota has been introduced in the formal govt. service and arrangements have been made for the women entrepreneurs to initiate ventures in different sectors. The majority of women workers are involved primarily in the informal sector of the economy. Within the formal sector, a large number of women works in export-oriented industries (e. g, garments), the source of 70 percent of Bangladesh's foreign exchange. Significant number of women also works as teachers, lawyers, journalists, government employees, and for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Their activities, in turn, contribute to transformation of traditional values and of Bangladeshi women. The present study on Health and Safety of Women Garment Workers is a modest attempt to show how health and safety of garment workers could be improved. The study will benefit the garment sector, as the suggesting of the study are likely to persuade future planners to do plan for the health & safety issues of Bangladesh's garment workers.

The study is based on theoretical, practical and statistical analysis. It is hoped that this paper will prove to be a reliable source of secondary information for the people who will work

in the similar field. It is expected that this report will be able to satisfy all the people for whom the report has been prepared.

## 1.2 Law Related to Health and Safety of Women Garment Employees

Labor Law regulates matters, such as, labor employment, remunerations, and conditions of work, trade unions, and labor management relations. There are also social law which regulates such aspects as compensation for accident caused to a worker at work, fixation of minimum wages, maternity benefits, sharing of the company's profit by the workers, and so on. Most of these legal instruments regulate rights and responsibilities of the working people.

With the growth and expansion of industries in the subcontinent beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, new avenues for employment were created, resulting in a gradual migration of the labour force from rural areas to mills and factories located primarily in urban areas. At that time, in the absence of any state control or organization of the workers, the employers were less concerned about needs of their employees; the work hours were too long, wages much below the subsistence level, and the worker's employment conditions were unsatisfactory. The situation led to the enactment of a number of legislations beginning from the year 1881. These include, inter alia, the Factories Act (1881), Workmen's Compensation Act (1923), Trade Unions Act (1926), Trade Disputes Act (1929), Payment of Wages Act (1936), Maternity Benefit Act (1939), and the Employment of Children Act (1938).

**Establishments:** The Factories Act 1881 is the basis of all labor and industrial laws of the country. It contained provisions even for hours of work of women and workers, including that of minimum age for employment of children. After the International Labor Organization (ILO) was formed in 1919, this Act was amended and thereafter repealed, resulting in the promulgation of the Factories Act 1934, which remained in force till 1965, when the Factories Act 1965 was promulgated incorporating some provisions of the ILO conventions. The Act of 1965 applies to manufacturing establishments employing ten or more person with or without the aid of any mechanical power. It makes provision for women and juvenile workers. It also prohibits child labour, it limits work of a child in factories, including the seasonal ones.

**Holidays:** The Weekly Holidays Act of 1942 prescribes one paid holiday a week for persons employed in any shop, restaurant or theatre (excepting those employed in a confidential capacity or in a position of management). The government is empowered to grant additional half-day holiday with pay in a week.

**Industrial relations:** The Industrial Relations Ordinance of 1969, including the Industrial Relations Rules of 1977 framed there under, provides for formations of trade unions and regulation of relations between employers and workers. At the time of the promulgation of this ordinance, there were three separate laws regulating the relations between employees and employers, namely the East Pakistan Trade union Act of 1965, which provided for the formation and functioning of trade unions, the East Pakistan Labour Disputes Act of 1965, which provided for investigation and settlement of labour disputes, and the East Pakistan Employment of Labour (standing orders).

The first two of these above acts were repealed by the ordinance of 1969. This ordinance provides for various ways of settlement of industrial disputes, which were defined in the Act of 1965, since public interest is involved in settlement of industrial dispute, and adjudication as such through labour courts bears much importance. The labour courts play an important role for maintenance of industrial peace through settlement of issues on labour management problems, and hence they enjoy the confidence of both the employers and the workers.

Development of adjudication system was conceptual, brought in by the Trade Dispute Act of 1929, which used to provide for investigation and settlement of trade disputes and for certain other connected matters. A court of enquiry consisted of an independent chairman and one or more independent persons appointed by the prescribed authority. To overcome the difficulties in the Act of 1929 some provisions were made in the Defense of India Rules, 1939 for adjudication of disputes between employers and their workers. This process continued till the expiry of the said Rules on 31 March 1947. The industrial Act, 1947 came into being on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of April 1947. The Act established full-ledged industrial tribunals for adjudication of industrial disputes for the first time. Thereafter the East Pakistan Labour Disputes Act, 1965 was promulgated with effect from September 1965. This law like the Industrial Disputes Ordinance, 1959 envisaged constitution of courts under the name of labour court by the government. It also provided for appeal procedure similar to what was included in the Industrial Disputes Ordinance, 1959, against an award of the labour court to the labour appellate tribunal by the aggrieved party.

The Employment of Labour (Standing Orders) ACT, 1965 provided for a grievance procedure for redress of individual grievance of any particular worker in respect of their employment or conditions of work or infringement thereof. This widened the scope of the Labour Court and its jurisdictions to look into the grievances of individual workers

in respect of their rights arising out of any matter covered by the said Act.

**Condition of service:** Legislation concerning long-term policy, as a means of fostering economic stability and growth, is relatively a new concept in labour law. There was almost no legislative regulation on the terms and conditions of employment in shop, industrial or commercial establishment. The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders ) Act, 1946 came into operation for the first time requiring employers in industrial establishments employing 100 or more workmen to define the terms of employment of workmen in the form of standing orders which should be in general conformity with the model standing orders incorporated in the Act.

**Wages:** The government of India set up an enquiry committee in 1926 to ascertain the loophole for irregularity of payment of wages to industrial workers. The Royal Commission on Labour appointed in 1929 considered the reports and suggestions of the aforesaid enquiry committee and recommended for enactment for prevention of maladies relating to payment of wages, resulting in the promulgation of the Payment of Wages Act in 1939. It aimed, firstly, at disbursement of actual distributable wages to workers within the prescribed period and, secondly, to ensure that the employees get their full wages without any deduction. The Act was passed to regulate the payment of wages of certain classes of persons employed in industry.

**Social security:** Statutory provisions exist for only two contingencies, i.e. employment-related injuries and childbirth. The liability in both cases is entirely that for the employer. The Workmen's Compensation of taka 400 per month, including for all railway and other categories of workers was specified in the Act.

**Women workers:** The provisions regarding hours of work in the Factories Act 1965 apply to workers of both sexes. The Act stipulates that no women should be allowed to work in a factory except between 6 am and 7 pm. The government is empowered, in respect of any class or classes of factories, to vary these limits to any span of 13 hours between 5 am and 7-30 pm.

### 1.3 Objective of the study

The objectives of the study are as following:

1. To evaluate the status of occupational safety and health in Bangladesh;
2. To know the real pictures of the women Garment employees of CTG Asian Apparels Ltd.

3. To evaluate the health and safety practice regarding the women Garment employees of CTG Asian Apparels Ltd.
4. To recommend ways and means to face the challenges by the women Garment employees of CTG Asian Apparels Ltd.

### 1.4 Methods of Investigation

Sources of data:

Data for the study were collected both from primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources were confined to the printed materials of the Chittagong Asian Apparels Ltd. Data from primary sources were collected by structured interview of 40 employees of Chittagong Asian Apparels Ltd, which constituted the study sample. In the study, no conventional system of sampling procedure has been followed. Rather a convenient sampling technique was used considering time and other logistic facilities available at the disposal of the researchers. The 40 respondents constituted 3.33 % of the total 1200 employees in the factory. It took eight days to complete the whole data collection.

**Analysis & Processing of Data:** The collected data were processed and analyzed by simple tabular technique, and averages.

### 1.5. Limitations of the study

Although the women garment employees were very much polite and quite friendly and cooperative enough, the researchers had to face some constraints while doing this study. These include.

- Time constraints available in the hands of the researcher;
- Miss-interpretation of data provided by the company;
- In Asian Apparels Ltd. secrecy posed a major problem since disclosure of information was restricted as per the policy of the company.
- The related information was pretty large as well as unstructured and it was a difficult task for the researchers to compile them.

## 2. Status of Occupational Safety & Health in Bangladesh

### 2.1 Theoretical proposition

The occupational health and safety in Bangladesh is still in the developmental stage. Here, the occupational health & safety refers mainly to the workers of industries but does not completely cover all occupations of the country. The main laws related to occupational health and safety in this country

are the Factory Act, 1965 and the factory Rule of 1979. There are also a number of other laws and regulations that have some provisions related to occupational health and safety.

The constitution of Bangladesh recognizes productivity as the basic need for development and covers right to work and reasonable wages, medicare, and disease and disablement. This constitutional policy direction did not turn into a formal national occupational health and safety policy.

For certain work, environment factors, manufacturing process, machineries and toxic substances, and the levels of concentration of substances in the air have been recommended by various international organization and agencies.

Lack of work environment standards and exposure limits for different hazards and lack of requirement for periodic medical examination are the major deficiency of the legislations in terms of occupational health and safety. (OHS).

The laws in Bangladesh require employers to undertake corrective measures on occupational safety and health. But the lack of awareness, training, non-compliance of the OHS standards by the employers, and the negative involvement of the workers prevent achieving the goal of providing safety and health to the workers as intended by the laws. But in most cases there is non-compliance of these laws. labour legislations in Bangladesh were prepared in-conformity with ILO conventions. Country's constitutions and in considering the socio-economic conditions, Non-compliance or non-implementations of labour laws have short-term and long-term effect on the economy of Bangladesh, as can be seen in the following:

- a) The work place environment in factories and mills will turn hazardous, which may cause accidents and incidents.

- Factory to be kept clean and free from effluvia and dirt (S.11).
- Arrangements to be made for disposal of wastes and effluents (S.12)
- Adequate ventilation and temperature to be provided (S.13)
- Measures to be taken for prevention of accumulation of dust and fume (S.14).
- Standards for artificial humidification to be fixed (S.15)
- Overcrowding-related injuries to health of workers to be avoided. 9.9/14.2 cubic meters of space must be provided for each worker (S.16)
- Sufficient and suitable lighting must be provided in every part of the factory (S.17).
- Glazer windows to be kept clean. Measures need to be taken for presentation of glare and formation of shadows (S.17).
- Suitable points for wholesome drinking water must be provided. Drinking points to be legibly marked and located away from urinals. Water needs to be cooled if the number of workers is 250 or more (S.18).
- Latrines and urinals to be separately provided for male and female workers. They should be will lighted and ventilated (S.19)
- Sufficient number of spittoons must be provided. Whoever spits outside the spittoons shall be punishable (S.20).

Source: - Chittagong Asian Apparels Ltd.

- b) All accidents and incidents create human sufferings, having direct or indirect costs on the productivity and profits.
- c) The hazards, which are prevailing in the industries e.g. electric short circuit and fine in the garment industry, are mostly the outcome of the absence of good working conditions, absence of protective and preventive measures. Poor housekeeping etc.
- d) The direct cost of preventing hazards is much smaller than the indirect costs of accidents and illnesses. Cost benefit analysis of an accident may give a clear picture of various items of loss. The productivity as well as the profitability of any industry largely depends upon how far measures have been taken to prevent hazards in the industry.
- e) The lack of implementation of legal provision i.e. the non-compliance of the ILO conventions in the work places not only causes loss to the workers, it causes a huge loss to the employers and the nation as a whole.

## 2.2 The Concept of Employee's Health

The well being of the employee in an industrial establishment is affected by accidents and by ill health-physical as well as mental. In this section, we shall discuss the need for healthy workers and health services to be provided by the management to ensure the continuing good health of their employees. We propose to examine employee's health from the following angles-physical health, mental health, noise control, AIDS, drug abuse and violence in work place. The protection of the health of the workers is a legal requirement too. Section 11 to 20 of the Factories Act, 1948 deal with the health of workers, which are mentioned below:

### 2.2.1 A Physical Health

Ill health of employees results in reduced productivity, higher unsafe acts, and increased absenteeism. A health

worker produces results opposite to these. The worker who is healthy is always cheerful, confident looking, and is an invaluable asset to the organization. A realization of the advantages, which flow from a healthy workforce, has impelled much management to provide health services to their employees, which vary from the simple provision of first-aid equipment to complete medical care.

### 2.2.2 A Mental Health

In recent years, mental health of employees, particularly that of executives, has engaged the attention of employees. Three reasons may be given for this development. First, mental breakdown is common in modern days because of pressures and tensions. Second, mental disturbances of various types result in reduced productivity and lower profits for the organization. Third, mental illness takes its toll through

alcoholism, high employee turnover, and poor human relationships.

### 2.3 The Concept of Employee's Safety

Safety means freedom from the occurrence or risk of injury or loss. Industrial safety or employee safety refers to the protection of workers from the danger of industrial accidents. An accident is an unplanned and uncontrolled event in which an action or reaction of an object, a substance, a person, or a radiation results in personal injury. In this context, it is useful to recollect the provisions of the Factories Act, 1948 relating to safety. Sections 21 to 40 of the Act deal with safety. These provisions are absolute and obligatory and the occupier of every factory is bound to follow them. The relevance provisions of the Factory Act are mentioned below:

- S.21 provides that dangerous Part of every machinery must be securely fenced.
- S.22 stipulates that any young person or a woman should not handle a machinery in which is in motion.
- S.23 states that young persons should not be allowed to work on dangerous machines.
- S.24 states that every factory must provide suitable striking gear.
- S.25 States that no traversing part to be allowed to run within a distance of 45 centimeters from any fixed structure.
- S.26 requires that casting should be done in such a way as to prevent danger.
- S.27 stimulates that women and children should be prohibited from going near cotton openers.
- S.28 states that hoists and lifts should be in good condition and should be examined once in every six months.
- S.29 states that lifting machines, chain, ropes and lifting tackles must be in good construction and should be examined in every 12 months.
- S.30 requires that notice of maximum safe working speed of grindstone or abrasive wheel, etc, to be kept near the machine.
- S.31 stipulates that safe working pressure should not be exceeded.
- S.32 requires that in every factory all floors, steps, stairs, passages and gangways shall be of sound construction and be properly maintained.
- S.33 states that pits, sumps and openings in floors must be covered or fenced.
- S.34 states that no person shall be employed in any factory to lift or carry excess weight so as to cause him/her physical injury
- S.35 mandates provision of goggles or lenses to protect erosions working on machines, which cause damage to his/her eyesight.
- S.36 prohibits entry of any worker into any chamber, tank pit or pie where any gas or fume is present.
- S.37 mandates that measures to be taken to prevent explosion on ignition at gas or fume.
- S.38 mandates that measures must be taken to prevent outbreak of fire and its spread.
- S.39 states that where unsafe condition is reported, the inspector may serve a notice on the occupier to initiate suitable measures to restore safety.
- S.40 states that where a factory employs 1000 or more workers. There must be a qualified safety officer a(s) appointed to measure compliance of all the safety provisions.

Source: - Chittagong Asian Apparels Ltd.

An accident-free plant enjoys certain benefits. Major ones are substantial savings in costs, increased productivity, and avoiding and legal penalties.

#### 2.3.1 A Cost Savings

The management incurs two types of costs when an accident occurs. More serious than the direct costs are the indirect or hidden costs, which the management cannot avoid.

In fact, the indirect costs are three to four times higher than the direct costs. Hidden costs include loss on account of down-times of operators, slowed-up production rate of other workers, materials spoiled and labour for cleaning, and damages to equipment. A safety plant, by avoiding accidents, eliminates these direct and indirect costs.

#### 2.3.2 Increased productivity

Safety plants are efficient plants. To a large extent, safety promotes productivity. Employees in safe plants can devote more time to improving the quality and quantity of their output and spend less time worrying about their safety and well being.

### 2.3.3 Legal

There are legal reasons too for undertaking safety measures. There are laws covering occupational health and safety, and penalties for non compliance have become quite severe. The responsibility extends to the safety and health of the surrounding community, too. Finally, financial losses, which accompany accidents, can be avoided if the plant is accident free.

## 2.4. The Pre-Requisites of Women Garment Employee's Safety

When we take the same factories as example, it is management's duty to ensure "safety" in several areas such as:

- The structure itself
- Installations and fixtures (check electrical, plumbing, air conditioning and other installations)
- Furniture and work areas (e. g. slippery floor, hazardous obstacles in traffic areas), safety of furniture, equipment, appliances and utensils.
- Health safety ( nontoxic cleaning material and detergents used) good quality air ( what we breathe, dependent upon the type of equipment installations and fixtures used and regular repairs and maintenance)
- Food safety (a whole world in itself including sanitation, food spoilage, correct handling procedures, allowable and recommended temperatures. etc.), and checking and control procedures.

An important "preventive measure" is eliminating the possibility of communicating contagious diseases. Even if local regulations do not require it, it is recommended that soda food and beverage handlers undergo regular medical checkup. Another preventive measure is the formulation and implementation of policies and procedures related to employee accidents which may present a threat to food situation. Culinary staff who cut themselves accidentally at work, as often happens while sliding food products, have to immediately stop handling food, and report to their Executive Chef and to the person in charge. First Aid in the company (Security or Human Resources Department) for preliminary treatment and handling, healing and precautionary measures are to be taken before they are allowed back at their job.

There are also some basic "dress" requirements for staff involved in food and beverage preparations: e.g. Chefs' hats (to prevent hair and whatever hair contains to fall into food), discreet earring (non-dangling) or no earring for women, and long hair neatly and securely tied in a bun at the back of the head. Of no lesser importance is the safety of work tools and work procedures covering all areas, such as stable judders, secure shelving, safety shoes, well-fitting work garments, clearly written and complete safety procedures and guidelines form management, safety training, and safety installations and equipment, wider traffic areas (to prevent accidents), adequate staffing, and last but not least, continuous effective training in work procedures.

All of this necessitates comprehensive planning, the creation of clear policies and work procedures, organization, training of supervisors and employees, supervision and control.

## 2.5 Garment Factory Workers

The majority of the workers in the Asian Apparels were young, belonging to the age group 16 to 29 years, of which 81.6 percent women and 80.0 percent men, compared to 73.03 per cent women and 60 per cent men in the rural garment factories. Workers in two of the rural garment factories had the same age profile as the workers in the Asian Apparels. The majority were also single, women and men, 83.4 per cent women and 70.0 per cent men in the Asian Apparels and 65.6 per cent men and 66.7 per cent women in the rural garment factories.

The women were part of the large labour reserve that have been moving in and out, or have been moved out of the factories. Their motives for seeking employment in these factories were: the need for a job and income and the absence of alternative employment opportunities. The spouse of married workers welcomed the economic participation of women as a contribution to family income. A small number of women workers had been previously employed, mainly in garment factories, while the men had been in a wide range of jobs.

Labour legislation provided for a nine hour working day, inclusive of a one hour interval but 40.8 per cent of women and 36.7 per cent of men in the Asian Apparels worked more than nine hours in compulsory overtime. And around 70 per cent women and 70 per cent to 100 per cent men were employed in night shifts. Only the higher-level workers could leave the workplace during the lunch and tea breaks.

Trade unions could not operate in Asians Apparels and around half the workers were members of the organizations established by employers.

Wages were low but were in conformity with or above the minimum wages specified for garment workers. Around 90 per cent received Rs 2,500 to Rs 5,000 a month, which is just above the ‘poverty line.’ In the Asian apparels minimum workers’ benefits such as EPF, ETF, and overtime payments were given. They also got medical benefits and tea, but only half of them had meals and rest room facilities and few had transport facilities.

### 3. Motivation of the Women Garment Employees

For the purpose of analyzing the motivation of women garment employees, the researchers conducted a survey on workers of Asian Apparels by preparing a questionnaire. The respondents were selected through random sampling. The worker’s opinion regarding different issues of Asian Apparels can be discussed in the response to the questionnaire as given below:

Questions	No of Respondent					
	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree(A)	Neutral(N)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Total
1. Is salary sufficient in relation to job?	15	10	10	5		40
2. Is labour-management relation favorable?	14	12	6	6	2	40
3. Is there any promotion facility?	16	14	10			40
4. Is salary paid in time?	20	10	8	2		40
5. Are environmental factors at work place congenial?	18	10	10	2		40
5. Is the company providing any reward or incentives for achieving target or personal achievement?	16	13	9	2		40

Source: - Field survey.

### Comments on the Survey

By considering the survey response of women garment workers, we can say that the motivational factors of workers are adequate and that’s why all the workers are satisfied.

### 4. Recommend action to fight Challenges faced by Women Garments Employees

Asian Apparels is the largest employer of women in the formal manufacturing sector. This article explores the social, political, and economic contexts of this class and how women’s earnings affect household gender dynamics within a framework of exit and voice. It draws on interviews of the garment factory workers to explore how work has different meanings for workers of different classes and how these perceptions influence gender roles and practices within the household.

The work has different meaning for women of different classes and those perceptions influence gender roles and practice within the household. Women from various class backgrounds are employed because they can be molded into

compliant workers. The multi-class character of the workforce combined with the threat of layoffs prevents solidarity and makes unionization difficult. Some single women feel empowered by their earnings. Most married women are unable to leverage their income into greater decision-making power. But the income is essential for household welfare, and women need these jobs. Policy recommendations involve national and international actors; they emphasize crèches (day care center), savings, and severance pay at the garment factory level as well as the institutions of global living wages and working standing by the international labour Organization.

The health and safety issues covered in the reports are almost identical. They include excessively high temperatures – or very low temperatures in Bangladesh; dust; inadequate ventilation; inadequate lighting; excessive noise; lack of fire-fighting equipment; blocked exists; bad sanitation; unhygienic canteens; and lack of drinking water. Apart from specific illness brought on by these conditions, many workers find it very difficult, if not impossible to take time off due to illness.

Excessive working hours, or lack of work, sub-minimum wages and the denial of the right to organize and negotiate are all deeply interwoven. Increased flexibility leads to increased normalization and job insecurity. While workers are afraid to losing their jobs they are more willing to accept lower wages in order to keep their jobs. When wages are low, workers have to work longer hours in an attempt to earn anything like a decent wage. Insecure jobs mean that workers are unable to organize, as they can lose their jobs for organizing.

To get an urgent remedy from the stated weak points, it is suggested:

- Promotion facility should be increased.
- The companies should develop adequate promotional policy.
- The companies should be upgraded with the economic situation which can motivate the women garment workers.
- There should be together between management and workers in order to increase communication.
- Training program for women garment workers. Supervisors, quality checkers, quality controllers, production in-charge should be increased.
- To face the upcoming global challenge the organizations should build backward linkage factory.

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