# Violence against the elderly at home in times of the Covid-19 pandemic

# Violência contra a pessoa idosa no domicílio em tempos de pandemia da Covid-19

# Violencia contra el adulto mayor en el hogar en tiempos de la pandemia del Covid-19

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**How to cite:** Araújo MC, Reis DA. Violence against the elderly at home in times of the Covid-19 pandemic. REVISA. 2024; 13(4): 978-90. Doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.36239/revisa.v13.n4.p978a990">https://doi.org/10.36239/revisa.v13.n4.p978a990</a>

# **REVISA**

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Received: 23/07/2024 Accepted: 13/09/2024

ISSN Online: 2179-0981

#### **RESUMO**

Objetivo: analisar as evidências científicas sobre violência contra o idoso no contexto familiar em tempos de pandemia de covid-19. **Método:** trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura, que compreendeu buscas nas bases de dados on-line e biblioteca virtual Bdenf, SciELO, Lilacs, WOS, Medline, Cinahl, Science Direct e Scopus, no período de 2019 a 2022, tendo como descritores controlados o DeCS e o MeSH. **Resultados:** os tipos de violência contra a pessoa idosa no contexto familiar em tempo de pandemia da covid-19 detectadas foram abuso financeiro, negligência, abandono, abuso psicológico e maus-tratos físicos, sendo que os dois últimos sobressaíram em relação aos demais. Os agressores mais pertinentes foram filhos ou cônjuge dos filhos. **Conclusão:** a revisão evidenciou os tipos de violência contra a pessoa idosa que foram abuso financeiro, negligência, abandono, abuso psicológico e maus-tratos físicos, sendo que os agressores mais frequentes foram os filhos.

Descritores: Idoso; Violência doméstica; Covid-19; Família.

#### **ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** to analyze the scientific evidence on violence against the elderly in the family context in times of the covid-19 pandemic. **Method:** this is an integrative literature review, which included searches in the online databases and virtual library virtual Bdenf, SciELO, Lilacs, WOS, Medline, Cinahl, Science Direct and Scopus, in the period from 2019 to 2022, with the descriptors controlled by DeCS and MeSH. **Results:** the types of violence against the elderly in the family context during the covid-19 pandemic detected were financial abuse, neglect, abandonment, psychological abuse and physical abuse, with the last two standing out in relation to the others. The most relevant aggressors were children or spouses of children. **Conclusion:** the review showed the types of violence against the elderly that were financial abuse, neglect, abandonment, psychological abuse and physical abuse, and the most frequent aggressors were children.

Descriptors: Elderly; Domestic violence; Covid-19; Family.

#### RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar la evidencia científica sobre la violencia contra el adulto mayor en el contexto familiar en tiempos de la pandemia por covid-19. **Método:** se trata de una revisión integrativa de la literatura, que incluyó búsquedas en las bases de datos en línea y biblioteca virtual Bdenf, SciELO, Lilacs, WOS, Medline, Cinahl, Science Direct y Scopus, en el período de 2019 a 2022, con los descriptores controlados por DeCS y Malla. **Resultados:** los tipos de violencia contra el adulto mayor en el contexto familiar detectados durante la pandemia de covid-19 fueron el maltrato económico, la negligencia, el abandono, el maltrato psicológico y el maltrato físico, destacando estos dos últimos con relación a los demás. Los agresores más relevantes fueron los hijos o cónyuges de los hijos. **Conclusión:** la revisión destacó los tipos de violencia contra las personas mayores, que fueron el abuso financiero, la negligencia, el abandono, el abuso psicológico y el abuso físico, siendo los agresores más frecuentes los niños. **Descriptores:** Adulto Mayor; Violencia Doméstica; Covid-19; Familia.

## Introduction

Population aging has been occurring in several countries, at different times and at different paces. As a result of the improvement in quality of life and the decline in fertility and mortality rates, the portion of the elderly population increased significantly. The demographic transition had its origin in Europe, with the reduction of the fertility rate in the Industrial Revolution. In addition, population aging is also parallel to the epidemiological transition, in which infectious and parasitic diseases lose strength to the detriment of other pathologies, allowing greater control over them and increasing life expectancy<sup>1</sup>.

In Brazil, this process is no different. Although this age transition began later in developing countries, it occurs more quickly, justified by the improvement in health conditions and the importation of technologies. From the second half of the 1960s onwards, there was an absolute and relative increase in the percentage of elderly population in the country, bringing new population challenges and modifying social and public health issues. Therefore, since more specific care is part of the need of this age group, this change entails a reorganization of the Health System, in addition to the development of new practices that meet current needs<sup>2</sup>.

Although this aging is related to an improvement in quality of life, it still occurs in unfavorable conditions for the elderly population. The tendency is that the Brazilian age pyramid can reach the typical format of more developed nations, the elderly are not yet the target of intense public policies, or even the due attention of the authorities. Concomitantly, the lack of population harmony with this age group has consequences for the nation, both financial, since the elderly are not able to be independent, and social, since intra-family relationships become close and turbulent<sup>3</sup>.

Violence against the elderly emerges as one of the main issues related to the new public health problems, with actions being constituted or highlighting the lack of them, which harms the physical and/or emotional integrity of the elderly, resulting in the impediment of their social performance<sup>4</sup>.

From this perspective, this problem is considered global and difficult to manage, since 60% of cases of violence against the elderly occur in the intrafamily context. With a high level of dependence of this age group on family members or caregivers, vulnerability is also proportional, leading to an abuse of power by those responsible.

In addition, a large portion of elderly people in Brazil receive some benefit from Social Security. Often, this fact leads to the visualization of this individual by the rest of the family as a financial reference in the household in which he lives, being one of the factors that facilitate violence and that somehow drive violent acts and abuse. The increase in morbidity and mortality and institutionalization is directly linked to this, generating serious problems in terms of mental health and family relationships<sup>5</sup>.

With the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic, some contexts have changed. To control the spread of the virus and reduce contagion, social isolation was part of the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), being one of the most expressive and the one that most impacted the lives of several families. In addition to the changes caused in the intra-family relationships themselves, social isolation also brought the need to adapt and change habits, causing high degrees of stress and anxiety. Relationships intensified and the appearance of conflicts stood out, due to a context of greater coexistence between family members, with violence as the main aspect<sup>6</sup>.

In relation to the elderly population, several aspects contributed to this period of isolation being troubled and possibly there were cases of violence, a multicausal and complex problem, involving dependence to meet basic needs, increased stress on the part of family members, limitation of the elderly to health services for regular monitoring.

This multicausal problem caused by covid-19 in the world makes it extremely important to interpret literary data so that it is possible to understand the main factors that cause cases of violence in the family context and assist in carrying out awareness actions so that there is a reduction in the number of occurrences. In addition, through the analysis of scientific evidence, it will be possible to synthesize the results obtained and bring them to the reading public in a more organized way, helping in the study of the subject.

The research can contribute a lot to the performance of multidisciplinary teams that are routinely faced with situations like this, so that they know how to identify when it is a case of violence and practice health education, instructing those responsible for the elderly, in addition to presenting mechanisms that can reduce the facilitating factors of intrafamily violence.

The study in question aims to analyze the scientific evidence available in the national and international literature on violence against the elderly in the family context in times of the covid-19 pandemic.

#### Method

It is an Integrative Literature Review (RIL), based on six stages: 1) Elaboration of the guiding question, 2) Search in the literature, 3) Data collection, 4) Critical analysis of the included studies, 5) Discussion of the results, 6) Presentation of the integrative review<sup>7</sup>. The guiding question of this study was based on the Pico strategy (acronym for P: population/patients; I: interest; Co: Context), thus being defined as: What is the national and international scientific evidence on violence against the elderly in the family context in times of the covid-19 pandemic?.

The literature search corresponded to the period from January to February 2023, and the established time frame was from December 2019 to June 2022, respecting the beginning of the pandemic to the present day.

The identification of the descriptors was made in Portuguese, English and Spanish, selected on the Virtual Health Library (VHL) portal through consultation with DeCS/MeSH. The descriptors were combined and using Boolean operators (AND).

The survey of articles was conducted in the following online databases and virtual library: Nursing Databases (Bdenf), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (Lilacs), Web of Science (WOS), Online System for Search and Analysis of Medical Literature (Medline), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (Cinahl), Science Direct and Scopus.

To access the databases and the electronic library, a survey of the articles was carried out on the Portal of Journals of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes), through remote access to the signed content, in the Federated Academic Community (CAFe) by the Federal University of Amazonas (Ufam).

The inclusion criteria defined for the analysis of the articles were: original articles published in the pre-established time frame, in national and international journals, present in the aforementioned databases, which address the theme of violence against the elderly in the family context in times of the covid-19 pandemic. While the exclusion criteria were articles in which the following are not available in full, preliminary note, narrative, integrative and systematic review, as well as editorial.

After searching the database and virtual library, 111 articles were selected for evaluation of applicability to the theme, and 97 articles were excluded because they did not meet the objectives of the study. The remaining articles (n=14) were evaluated for eligibility, however, ten were excluded. Finally, four articles were selected to constitute the present review, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1- Flowchart of search and selection of studies in the Databases adapted from Prisma<sup>8</sup> -Brazil-2023.

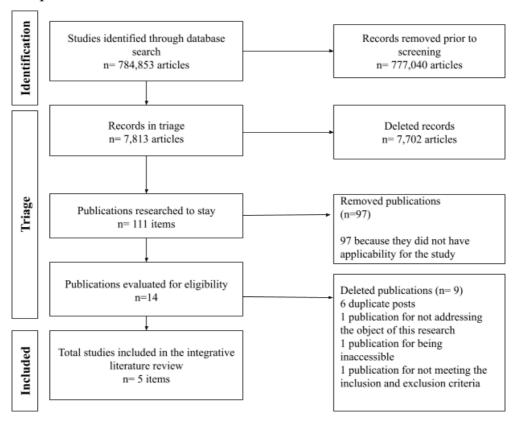


Chart 1 presents the descriptors elaborated for the strategies for searching for articles in databases and electronic libraries.

Chart 1- Search strategies in Portuguese, English and Spanish, considering the chosen descriptors and Boolean operators -Brazil-2023.

Strategy	Portuguese	English	Spanish	
1 <sup>a</sup>	Violência Doméstica	Domestic Violence	Violência Doméstica	
	AND Idoso	AND Aged	AND Anciano	

<b>2</b> <sup>a</sup>	Violência Doméstica	Domestic Violence	Violência Doméstica
	AND Idoso AND	AND Aged AND	AND Anciano AND
	covid-19	covid -19	covid-19
3 <sup>a</sup>	Violência OR Abuso de Idosos OR Violência Doméstica AND Idoso AND SARS-COV 2 OR COVID-19	Violence OR Elder Abuse OR Domestic Violence AND SARS-COV 2 OR COVID-19	Violencia AND Abuso de Ancianos OR Violência Doméstica AND SARS- COV 2 OR COVID-19

Data collection was carried out by filling out a form previously prepared by the researchers. The form was composed of the following items: name/identification of the journal (name, year, volume, number, Qualis, area of the journal), authors (institution, education and degree), country of origin and language(s) that have been published, research objective, method, period of data collection, place where the research was carried out, identification of the type of violence, target audience (subject or participant of the study), data analysis, limitations and interpretation of data and results. The instrument was able to ensure the extraction of all relevant data, minimize errors, and ensure accuracy in the data collected.

In the critical analysis phase, two adapted instruments were applied, which sought to assess the methodological quality and level of evidence of the selected articles. The first is called the Critical Apppraisal Skills Programme (casp) - Critical reading skills program developed by the University of Oxford<sup>9</sup> in 2002. This instrument allows a critical analysis during data reading, following a classification score of six to ten points (good methodological quality and reduced bias) and a minimum of five points (satisfactory methodological quality, but with increased risk of bias).

The second refers to the classification of the level of evidence, called the Hierarchy of Evidence Classification for the Evaluation of Studies: 1 - systematic reviews or meta-analyses of relevant clinical trials; 2 - evidence from at least one randomized, controlled and well-designed clinical trial; 3 - well-designed clinical trial, without randomization; 4 - well-designed cohort and case-control studies; 5 - systematic review; 6 - evidence from at least one of the qualitative or descriptive studies; 7 - opinions of authorities or expert committees, including interpretations of information not based on research<sup>10</sup>.

In the stage of discussion of the results, a comparison of the data found in the analyzed journals was made in relation to the theoretical framework. In addition, it sought to verify existing knowledge gaps and suggest guidelines for future research, as well as to reveal central issues in the area in focus and identify conceptual or theoretical frameworks<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, in the presentation phase of the RIL, the main results evidenced in the articles analyzed during the Integrative Review were exposed. Regarding the presentation of the RIL, the data were presented in a descriptive way and by means of a table and graph, using the Microsoft Excel program.

Regarding the ethical aspects of the research, it is noteworthy that all the authors consulted were cited in the text and referenced. The integrative review does not require the submission of the study to a Research Ethics Committee/REC.

### Results

Among the selected databases and electronic libraries, Lilacs predominated, and the year 2021 had the highest frequency of studies, regarding the year of publication, in addition, articles in English prevailed, as shown in Chart 2.

In relation to the objectives exposed by the authors who contributed to the studies, there is a variety, and, among them, we sought to identify the main types of violence against the elderly present in the family context, in addition to the aggressor.

Chart 2 - Characterization of the sample selected in the study. Manaus/AM. 2023.

ORD	DB/EL	Authors/Title	Journal	Year	Language	Objective	Main Results
1	Lilacs	Son YH, Cho MS <sup>11</sup> /Abuse and risk factors among community- dwelling elderly in South Korea during covid-19	Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect	2022	English	To estimate the prevalence and identify risk factors for elder abuse during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.	Social isolation and acknowledgment of abuse were associated with the experience of abuse. Older adults with a higher number of diseases, higher levels of dependence, depressive symptoms, and/or cognitive deficits were more likely to suffer abuse, as were those who smoked or consumed alcoholic beverages.
2	Lilacs	Du P, Chen Y <sup>12</sup> /Prevalence of elder abuse and victim-related risk factors during the covid-19 pandemic in China.	BMC Public Health	2021	English	To estimate the prevalence of elder abuse in China during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify changes in risk factors for elder abuse in the context of COVID-19.	The lower the income, the greater the risk of abuse. In addition, factors such as older age, being a woman, lower cognitive ability, and not having a cohabiting spouse have increased the possibility of abuse. The greater the number of children there are, the greater the risks of physical abuse, financial abuse, and neglect against the elderly.
3	Pubmed	Chang ES, Levy BR <sup>13</sup> /High Prevalence of Elder Abuse During the covid- 19 Pandemic: Risk and Resilience Factors	Am J Geriatr Psychiatry	2021	English	Estimate the prevalence and risk factors and resilience of elder abuse during the pandemic.	One in five older adults in the study sample (n = 191; 21.3%) reported having experienced abuse, an increase of 83.6% compared to prevalence estimates before the pandemic.

4	Scopus	Rojas B, Benigna V, Hilario S, Dina J, Ojeda C, Pedro V et al <sup>14</sup> /Vivencias y sentido de vida del adulto mayor victima de violencia familiar en tiempos de covid-19.	Revista Universida d y Sociedad	2021	Spanish	To understand the experiences and meaning of life of the elderly victim of family violence in times of covid-19.	The results show that the experience of the pandemic generated feelings of negativity, thoughts of not having strength, constant pain, a feeling of meaninglessness and of being a burden on the family. There was also a feeling of loneliness and they had no plans for the future due to lack of motivation for life, their ideals, dreams and expectations decreased, and the lack of strength to endure the pandemic, the fear of contagion announced that the only solution to free themselves from pain and suffering is death.
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Regarding the number of authors, one article had four authors and three had two authors. These are graduates in nursing, philosophy, arts, mathematics, law and economics, with degrees from undergraduate to postdoctoral degrees.

Regarding the planning of the methods used, the selected articles comprise different types of studies, including cross-sectional, cohort, ecological and phenomenological studies and were conducted using various research instruments.

Regarding the characterization of the selected studies, the areas of journals/journals encompassed axes such as collective health, interdisciplinarity and nursing.

With regard to the Qualis of journals, the A1 and A2 classifications appeared in similar proportions, indicating that these journals are widely recognized internationally and have a positive reputation in the scientific area. Regarding the study location, the four articles were carried out in different countries, namely South Korea, the United States, China, and Peru (Chart 3).

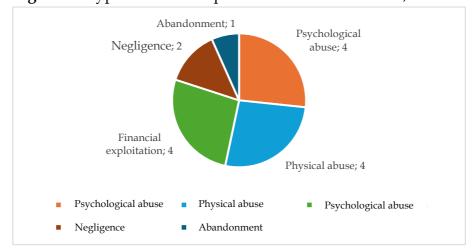
Chart 3 - Characterization of the selected studies, according to methodological design, journal qualis, instrument used, country/place of study, target audience and level of evidence. Brazil, 2023.

O R D	Methodological design	Qualis	Instrument used Country/Plac		Target audience	EL
1	Ecological Study	A2	Analysis of secondary data from the Living Profiles of Older People Survey in Seoul	South Korea/Seoul Metropolitan City	Elderly over 65 years old	III
2	Quantitative Research, Cross- Sectional Study	A1	Elders Abuse Questionnaire of the "Third Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status"	China/Hunan Province	Elderly aged 65 years and older	VI
3	Cohort Study	A1	Hwalek_sengstock elder abuse screening test (H- S/EAST) /Vulnerability to Abuse Screening Scale	United States	Elderly aged 60 and over	IV
4	Qualitative/Phen omenological Research	A2	Interview script	Peru/Pillco Marca District, Huánuco Province	Elderly	VI

Regarding the methodological evaluation, through the CASP checklist, the articles presented a score between ten and eight points, with one article obtaining a score of ten points and three presenting scores equivalent to eight and nine, presenting a good methodological quality and reduced bias.

Regarding the types of violence identified in the studies, financial abuse, psychological abuse, physical abuse, neglect and abandonment were detected. However, physical abuse and psychological abuse predominated, followed by financial abuse, neglect, and abandonment (Figure 2).

The aggressors evidenced in the studies were children or spouses of the children, neighbors, friends, roommates, relatives and others.



**Figure 2 -** Types of violence prevalent in studies. Brazil, 2023.

Note: variable for the type of violence obtained more than one in the articles analyzed.

#### Discussion

The statute of the elderly in Brazil refers to violence against the elderly as the execution or omission of an action that causes physical or psychological suffering and, in the worst cases, leads to the victim's death<sup>15</sup>.

The aging of human beings can cause a reduction in functional capacity, work capacity and resistance, making the aging person not only physically vulnerable but also susceptible to violence16. In one study, it was pointed out that, since 1997, the United States had already been looking for solutions to prevent, detect, and deal with violence against the elderly<sup>17</sup>, actions that continue to this day.

During the covid-19 pandemic, social distancing was one of the key points that contributed to the decrease in cases of infection by the new coronavirus, however, such a recommendation given by the WHO affected the quality of life especially of older adults. In the period from March to May 2020, when social isolation began in Brazil, the complaints made on "Dial 100" regarding mistreatment against the elderly increased over the months: in March there were 3 thousand, April 8 thousand and May 17 thousand 18.

Throughout the pandemic, a variety of articles were published on topics pertinent to covid-19, most of which were published between 2020 and 2022. In a bibliometric analysis of nursing publications, compared to 2020, the number of publications increased rapidly in the first ten months of 2021, and the most addressed topics were online education, stress, fear, quality of life, and experience to determine the impacts of the pandemic on mental health nursing education<sup>19</sup>. Such work contributes significantly to decision-making and to the expansion of knowledge about the pandemic.

Regarding the types of violence suffered by the elderly, an integrative review listed: psychological (28%), physical (28%), financial (12%), in addition to other types of violence (12%) and those that were not described (20%)<sup>20</sup>. In another study, which sought the profile of the aggressor of elderly people treated at a reference center for geriatrics and gerontology in the Federal District, Brazil, between 2008 and 2018, it was identified that children were the main aggressors identified, representing 72%, and in this variable, males were the most prevalent (39%)<sup>21</sup>. These articles collaborate with the present review, since similar results were found in the present study.

In China, the factor that strongly contributed to the emergence of this social problem was the income of the elderly<sup>12</sup>. The researchers also noted that the lower the income of the elderly person, the greater the probability of abuse<sup>12</sup>, so the financial issue is considered a risk factor for the prevalence of abuse<sup>22</sup>. In China, the income of older adults can be derived primarily from employment, from property in their name, and/or through financial aid granted by the state<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, the aggressor can take advantage of the fragility of the elderly person to practice financial abuse, especially during the pandemic, a moment composed of financial instability that considerably increased the rate of dismissal of employees<sup>12</sup>. Also in this study, negligence was more evident than financial abuse<sup>12</sup>, since social distancing recommendations contributed to the reduction of face-to-face contact between caregivers and elderly people. It is worth mentioning that the fact that the older individual is suffering abuse is not an impediment for him to suffer other types of abuse <sup>12</sup>.

Countries such as China, Japan and Korea are largely influenced by Confucianism, a system of thought that emerged in China by Kung-Fu-Tzu, Confucius, based on filial piety, that is, receiving care, support and love from their children, making the life of the elderly a priority for both society and the family<sup>23</sup>, providing the individual with all the support he needs. However, in China, the main aggressor is the children and grandchildren of older adults<sup>16</sup>, since the descendants are usually responsible for taking care of their parents and, therefore, live with the victim for longer. Another factor that can contribute to the type of aggressor is that these traditions originating from an oriental country are being forgotten.

As for the article on "Abuse and risk factors among elderly residents in the national community of South Korea during covid-19", it is noted that, unlike the previous study, the predominant violence is psychological abuse and, as for the type of aggressor, the results were not modified, however, abuse can increase when the victim maintains continuous contact with people who are not part of their family<sup>11</sup>. Thus, there is a need to develop studies to identify the cause.

In Brazil, the increase in calls to Dial 100 in 2020 was more evident in the Southeast region, with the most reported types of violence being physical, psychological, and negligence<sup>24</sup>. Regarding the place where the violence occurred, the most frequent were the house where the victim and the suspect live, the house where the victim lives and the suspect's house<sup>24</sup>. In almost half of the occurrences, children were the main suspects of having committed some violence against the elderly, followed by neighbors and grandchildren.<sup>24</sup>

As limitations of this RIL, the scarcity of studies on the subject is mentioned, since the inclusion criteria were well demarcated. In this sense, the study contributes to disseminating the scientific knowledge already available on the subject in question. It is necessary to develop scientific research on the subject to understand the risk factors, preventive strategies and successful interventions aimed at the protection and well-being of older people.

#### **Final Considerations**

The types of violence against the elderly in the family context during the covid-19 pandemic detected were financial abuse, neglect, abandonment, psychological abuse and physical abuse, the last two of which stood out in relation to the others. The most frequent aggressors were the children or the children's spouse.

Faced with this challenging situation, it is essential that the multidisciplinary health team is properly trained to recognize the indicators of violence against the elderly and use appropriate instruments to identify any violence. Once the situation is confirmed, it is crucial to notify and refer the case to the social service.

It is crucial to develop an individualized care plan for each older person, in order to meet their specific needs and provide a safe and welcoming environment. With this, the relevance of carrying out awareness campaigns and distribution of informative materials is highlighted not only during the month of July, dedicated to preventing and combating violence against the elderly, since this age group is constantly vulnerable to suffering some type of violence. It is important to maintain an ongoing effort to educate society and promote awareness of the rights of older adults throughout the year.

The active participation of the community is essential for reporting suspected cases of violence against older people, especially when the victim is unable to report it for herself. Omission is also considered a form of violence, so it must be taken into account in the identification and prevention of these cases.

# Acknowledgment

We thank the Institutional Program for Scientific Initiation Scholarship (Pibic) of the Federal University of Amazonas (Ufam) - Scholarship of the Federal University of Amazonas. GDP-S/0179/2022. The present work was carried out with the support of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel – Brazil (Capes) – Financing Code 001.

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