



The Impact of Early Marriage Practice to the Increasement of Stunting Case in Jepara Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the impact of early marriage on the increasing number of stunting cases in Jepara Regency. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques in this study include interviews, observations, and documentation. The data obtained were then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's data analysis techniques, which consist of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study indicate that the practice of early marriage in Jepara remains high. Early marriage is caused by premarital pregnancy, traditions, low economic status, and low levels of education. Stunting cases in Jepara are also relatively high despite showing a decline. In 2024, stunting cases in Jepara reached 2,731. The factors contributing to stunting in Jepara include inadequate nutrition for pregnant women and toddlers, limited parental knowledge regarding nutrition and parenting, poor sanitation, low economic conditions, and early marriage. Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the case of early marriage and stunting in Jepara are quite high. Based on the analysis, it found that early marriage has significant influence toward the growth of stunting in Jepara. This study is expected to give contribution in preventing early marriage and stunting.

Keywords: Early Marriage Practice, Stunting, Marriage

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INTRODUCTION

Stunting is one of the problems that has become the center of attention by the Indonesian government this time. Stunting is a condition where children fail to grow. This usually happens to children under 5 years old. It is because of chronic malnutrition and recurrent infections. Children who experience stunting usually can be seen from a height which is under normal condition, low level of intelligence, sick easily, and the risk of disease in the future (Fauziah, Trisnawati, Rini, & Putri, 2024). The case of stunting in Indonesia based on the result of a survey of Indonesia Nutrition Status decreased 19,8%. Meanwhile in 2023 the case of stunting is 21,5% (Humas BKPK, 2025). Then, the number of cases of stunting in Central Java is 20,7% in 2023. The number stunting in Central Java is influenced by many factors such as: chronic malnutrition, poverty, baby's weight at birth, the level of parents' education, achievement of complete basic immunizations, and the proper sanitation (Devi & Nurvita, 2025).

Jepara is one of the regions in Central Java with a low number of stunting. In 2023 around 5.353 infants experienced stunting. The number then decreased to 2.731 (3,28%) toddlers in 2024. Based on weighing data done by the public health office in Jepara regency in February 2025, the number of stunting increased again to 3.638 (4,89%) ("Angka Stunting Kabupaten Jepara," n.d.). The efforts to decrease the number of stunting in Jepara is done through a few actions such as giving blood-boosting tablets to pregnant moms, providing medical examination and pre-married

consultations, preventing the practice of early marriage, and giving nutrition to children who experienced stunting (Hidayat, 2024).

Previous data mentioned that one of the ways to decrease the number of stunting is by preventing early marriage. Early marriage is marriage that is done by children under legal age. Based on the change of Constitution Number 1 Year of 1974 through Constitution Number 16 Year of 2019 the limitation of age for marriage is 19 years old for both girls and boys. Mustajab & Indriani (2023) in their study shows that the practice of early marriage influences stunting (Mustajab & Indriani, 2023). The study stated that early marriage potentially 1,982 times produced toddlers who experienced stunting compared to adult marriage. Then, the study by Alza et al. (2023) also stated that early marriage becomes one of the factors of stunting (Alza et al., 2023). The age of pregnant mom influences nutrition and condition of pregnancy, so it can cause stunting.

There are some factors which cause early marriage. For example, social problems, economic problems, tradition and culture, as well as the stigma of some communities who assume teenagers who reach puberty are a shame if they haven't gotten married (Tampubolon, 2021). Besides, early marriage also can be caused by the low education and promiscuity which cause pregnancy before marriage (Indriani, Pratama, Sitepu, & Harahap, 2023).

Early marriage has become a high phenomenon in some regions in Indonesia, including Jepara regency. This practice potential gives long-term impacts to the health of moms and children, especially because couples who get married at such a young age tend not to be ready physically, mentally, or economically. The condition can increase the risk of the birth of children with poor nutritional status and continuing cases of stunting. Meanwhile, the stunting rate in Jepara Regency still shows a percentage that requires serious attention even though various government programs continue to be implemented.

This study becomes important because until now there has not been much research which specifically analyzes the direct relation between the practice of early marriage and the increment of stunting in the context of social and culture in Jepara. Whereas, the deep understanding about the relation and more effective intervention program. The result of this research is expected to give information based on data which help regional government, medical staff, and education institution in conducting strategy to prevent stunting which aimed to the root of the problems, includes the controlling early marriage

Early Marriage

Marriage is physical and spiritual connection between a man and a woman as a couple of husband and wife who purposed to create a harmonious and eternal family based on Almighty God (Sekarayu & Nurawati, 2021). Marriage in Indonesia is arranged in Constitution No.1 the Year of 1974 article 7 paragraph (1) stated that marriage is allowed if the man already reaches 19 years old and woman already reaches 16 years old. Then this constitution was revised to become marriage can be done by man and woman if they already reach 19 years old, then continued in verse 2 which stated that marriage of future bride and groom haven't reached 21 years old, they should get permission from their parents.

Early marriage is a marriage which is done by man and woman before their productive age, 20 years old for woman and 25 years old for man (Handayani, 2014). Early marriage is also defined as marriage in under age which children or teenagers haven't ready mentally and physically. Besides, their knowledge about marriage, family, and conflict management is low. So, it can trigger a less harmonious family (Rosyidah & Listya, 2019).

According to Islamic perspective, early marriage at such a young age is not expressly prohibited. It is often referred to history where Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him married Aisyah when she was 6 years old and started to live at the same house with Rasulullah at around 9 years old. But, history cannot be the foundation that Islam suggests early marriage. Many Ulama affirm that some views of many Ulama show disagreement about early marriage practice. As example, Imam Hanafi in "Fiqh of Women" states that early marriage is marriage which is done by boys under 18 years old and girls under 17 years old. Meanwhile, according to Imam Syafi'i early marriage refers to the marriage of a couple of boys and girls at the age of around 15 years old (Akbar, 1982).

From the medical point of view, marriage at an early age tends to have a more negative impact especially for girls, because they will become pregnant, give birth, and have a role as a mom. One of the negative impacts seen from the social side where the condition of emotion hasn't

stabilized yet. It has become one of the reasons the government set the minimum limit of marriage for women, which is 19 years old (Kurniawan, 2019).

Early marriage doesn't just happen; there are some factors which push the practice to happen. Mubasyaroh stated that there are four main factors of early marriage practice, which are economy, marriage arrangement, the partner's desire to maintain the relationship, as well as unplanned pregnancy factors (Mubasyaroh, 2016).

Marriage in early marriage gives various consequences for the someone who did it. The consequences include physiological, psychologic, as well as social economical aspects (Lestari, 2012). From the physiological side, unpreparedness of the reproduction organ also makes the body unready to get pregnant, so it will lead to various risks of complications. Data shows that the number of deaths of pregnant women and giving birth under 20 years reach 2-5 times higher than women above 20 years old. Psychologically, the person who married early is usually still at an unstable stage of mental development, so it often triggers disputes and even divorce. Meanwhile, the social and economical effects related to the level of maturity and financial independence. As a person who is getting older, their ability to work and meet family needs usually develops (Romauli & Vindari, 2014).

Stunting

Stunting is a condition where a child fails to grow due to a lack of nutrition. Stunting is characterized by a child's height being less than normal height. Malnutrition actually occurs in the womb and continues into the early period after birth, but signs of stunting usually only appear later (Djauhari, 2017).

Stunting that has occurred in children must be balanced with catch-up growth. If it is not balanced with catch-up growth, it can cause very big risks now and in the future, such as decreased growth, cognitive disorders, learning difficulties, as well as being susceptible to chronic diseases and even death. Stunting also can occur to newborn with normal weight. It is because the needs of nutritions and the nutritions of the baby are not fulfilled (Djauhari, 2017).

There are three main factors that cause stunting, namely parents, children and the environment. Parents, especially mothers, become the biggest factor of stunting if they pregnant and breast-feed experienced malnutrition. Apart from that, parents' knowledge regarding nutritional fulfillment and parents' occupations also influence stunting. Child factors include nutritional status in children, disease transmission, weaning time (stopping breastfeeding), gender, and age. Then, the environment is also important for child growth and development. Children who experience stunting are mostly born into inadequate environments, such as difficult access to clean water and inadequate sanitation (Devi & Nurvita, 2025).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Case study research aimed to investigate a phenomenon deeply (Yin & K., 2004). The case investigated in this research is the impact of early marriage to the number of stunting in Jepara regency. This research is located in Jepara regency. The subject in this research is early marriage and stunting happened in Jepara regency.

The data collection technique in this research is interview, observation, and documentation. The interview technique used was semi-structured, meaning that the questions that had been determined were adjusted to the answers from the source so that they were more focused (Yin & K., 2004). The informant in this research is teenagers, religious figures, families, community members, and society. Observation is done to complete data that has been obtained from an interview. Next, documents or documentation are done to analyze data about early marriage and stunting in Jepara regency.

The data that has been collected is then analyzed using data analysis techniques from Miles and Huberman. The data analysis technique consists of 3 steps, namely, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. Data reduction is the process of selecting and sorting data that is in accordance with the research focus. Data presentation in qualitative research can be in the form of narratives, graphs, photos, and so on. Drawing conclusions is the final conclusion of the research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994).

Then, the data validity technique used is triangulation. Triangulation is a data-checking technique that uses something else as a comparison (Moleong, 2017). This research uses data source triangulation, where researchers use different data sources to explore similar data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Early Marriage in Jepara Regency

Early marriage is one of the serious problems in Jepara regency. This can be seen from the data on marriage dispensation applications from year to year. Since 2022, there have been 1,352 applications for marriage dispensation. The detail of numbers of the marriage dispensation in each year are:

Table 1. Number of Marriage Dispensation Applicants in Jepara Regency (Hidayat, 2025)

YEAR	NUMBER OF APPLICANTS	MEN	WOMEN
2022	359	47	312
2023	382	53	329
2024	358	61	297
2025	253	39	224
TOTAL	1352	200	1162

From the data above it can be known that mostly the marriage dispensation applicants are women. It indicates that women are often in situations that require them to marry early, whether for economic, cultural or other reasons.

Reported by Murianews, the main factor in early marriage in Jepara district is getting pregnant first. From 1,352 the number of marriage dispensations from 2022 to 2025 The number of dispensation requests due to pregnancy was 505 requests (Hidayat, 2025). The Head of DP3AP2KB Jepara, Mudrikatun, said that almost all requests for marriage dispensation on the grounds of pregnancy were approved (Hidayat, 2025).

Pregnancy before marriage is one of the results of promiscuity. Promiscuity is a social relationship which is not tied to moral and social. In this association, teenagers have bigger freedom in having relationships with other people both emotionally and sexually without boundaries. Promiscuity happens because of many factors, both factors from the child or factors from the outside. But, the dominant factor is a very big curiosity of new things (Lotulung & Kasingku, 2024).

Apart from getting pregnant first, the culture of marrying at an early age in society is also a factor. Religious figures in Jepara mention that early marriage happens because there is an assumption that a daughter who does not marry for a long time will become the subject of gossip and can tarnish the family's good name. Therefore, many families marry off their daughters quickly to avoid the label of spinster.

This means that early marriage in some communities still occurs because of the strong social and cultural pressure attached to the image of women. There is an assumption that if a daughter does not marry for a long time, she will become a negative topic of conversation in the surrounding environment. This condition raises concerns for the family, especially regarding their reputation and good name. Labels like "spinster" are considered shameful, so parents feel compelled to marry off their daughters even though they are not yet mature. Thus, the decision to have an early marriage does not solely come from the child's readiness, but is more influenced by the family's desire to avoid stigma and maintain social honor in the eyes of society.

Indawati (2024) stated that there are 2 factors of early marriage, they are internal and external factors (Indawati, Said, Ismaniyah, Yuha, & Kusuma, 2024). Internal factors include: 1) the assumption that he is physically and mentally capable of getting married, 2) preventing zina, 3) feeling of love for your partner so that you are willing to do anything to be together, and 4) low level of education. Then, external factors that encourage early marriage are: 1) condition of economy, 2) traditions, and 3) social environment (promiscuity).

There are several impacts that arise from early marriage. The impact is not only felt by the couple themselves, but also by their families, the people around them, and even the country. The impacts of early marriage such as: 1) increase the risk of miscarriage and even complications for pregnant moms, 2) disputes that lead to domestic violence, 3) poverty, and 4) affairs as well as divorce (Indawati et al., 2024).

To overcome early marriage in Jepara district, communities in several sub-districts in Jepara district, such as Tahunan and Jepara sub-districts, have formed communities. The community consists of public figures, parents, and teenagers. Religious figures play a role as

educators and advisors because the community will have more faith in the words of community leaders. In the community there are many activities (interview, 2025)

1. Discussion of problems that occur in society
2. Training
3. Sharing
4. Recitation

Routine meetings are done once a month. The meetings are aimed at uniting residents, discussing problems in society, and most importantly, delaying or even stopping early marriage in society. In addition to regular meetings, in the second week of every month, training is also held for mothers and teenagers, such as stringing beads, making crafts, and managing food businesses. From these training activities, it was discovered that teenagers in Jepara district lack space for discussion, storytelling and creativity.

One of the community members said that society must work together to prevent early marriage (interview 2025). With this community cohesiveness, the social environment will become more supportive in protecting children's rights and encouraging them to grow and develop optimally without pressure to marry at a young age. Communities in Jepara also held a campaign to prevent early marriage for parents who think that early marriage is normal and parents who force their children to marry.

Community in every meeting, resource persons and religious figures always remind parents that their children are not mentally ready to get married. The community in JDalam every Risks borne after early marriage such as dropping out of school, economic conditions after marriage, and the mental and physical health of children. Meetings with resource persons and religious leaders always remind parents that their children are not mentally ready for marriage.

Beside social approach, the approach through religion is also implemented through recitation. Religious figures explain that marriage is not just about following trends or traditions, but must be carried out when both the man and the woman are ready physically and mentally. Religious figures explain that seeking knowledge is also an act of worship. So postponing marriage until a more mature age does not conflict with religion but can maintain public welfare, prepare physically and mentally, and can prevent the negative impacts of early marriage.

So postponing marriage until a more mature age does not conflict with religion but can maintain public welfare, prepare physically and mentally, and can prevent the negative impacts of early marriage. Parents also realize that children are a trust entrusted to them to care for. Therefore, as parents, they must guide and direct their children so they don't rush into marriage just because their friends are doing it.

To reduce cases of early marriage, preventive and repressive measures must be implemented by both the government and society. Examples of preventive measures that can be taken are creating laws regarding the minimum age for marriage, providing sex education, and educating the public about the dangers of early marriage. Then, the repressive steps that can be taken are to tighten the implementation of the law and implement a victim protection system if there are victims in early marriage (Indawati et al., 2024).

So preventing early marriage cannot be done by only one party. But, all of the layers from government, society, schools, and families must be actively involved. This collaboration is important so that education, supervision, and support that are needed can be run thoroughly and effectively.

Stunting in Jepara Regency

Stunting is the disruption of growth that happens to children under five years old which is caused by malnutrition. In Indonesia, stunting is considered a serious problem. This is because stunting can influence the quality of human resources (Devi & Nurvita, 2025). So, the government does various activities to decrease the number of stunting.

Table 2. Data of the Number of Stunting in Jepara Regency

Year	The Number of Stunting
2019	9.254
2020	7.333
2021	7.257
2022	7.227
2023	5.353

2024	2.731
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Weighing data

From the table above, it can be known that the number of stunting in Jepara regency is decreasing year by year. The decrease of the number of stunting in Jepara regency year by year shows that there is an increase in the effectiveness of medical and nutrition programs which are run by the government as well as increasing public awareness in maintaining children's growth and development.

Stunting cases in Jepara district occur due to many factors, including: 1) malnutrition in pregnant women and toddlers, 2) the lack of knowledge of mother about nutrition and parenting, 3) poor sanitation, 4) low level of economy, and 5) early marriage.

Nutritional needs of pregnant women increase two to three times compared to when they are not pregnant. Nutritional intake during pregnancy not only affects the mother's health but also the growth and development of the fetus she is carrying. Malnutrition in pregnant women can increase the risk of low birth weight (LBW) and even stunting. Therefore, pregnant women need to meet their nutritional needs and undergo regular check-ups so that any problems can be addressed promptly (Nasriyah & Ediyono, 2023).

Ishak et al. (2024) in their research stated that knowledge of parents about parenting is very influential for stunting (Ishak, Rate, Dewanti, & Dahro, 2024). Most mothers know about the importance of exclusive breast milk for their children's growth and development. But, some mothers don't know how to provide nutritious complementary foods to prevent stunting. Some mothers don't even know what stunting is or how to prevent it (Gita et al., 2024).

Based on research done by Wahdaniyah, Ningsi, & Sari (2022) stated that sanitation conditions at home can also influence the incidence of stunting in children under 2 years old. The quality of sanitation has become one of the causative factors of stunting. Children who grow with bad sanitations are likely to get sick easily, such as with diarrhea or other infections. So, parents need to provide a health toilet which fulfills medical requirements.

The main factors that trigger stunting in Indonesia are low family economic conditions and weak household food security. Toddlers who come from families with low income have greater likelihood of experiencing stunting than toddlers who come from high-income families. In addition, toddlers who live in families with unstable food conditions also have a higher risk of experiencing stunting compared to children who live in families with good food security (Aini, Hera, Anindita, Malangkay, & Amalia, 2022).

Jepara regency does various things to solve stunting. The government of Jepara regency does intervene. It was stated that the movement included eight forms of intervention directed at four target groups. For adolescent girls, interventions include providing iron supplements (TTD) every week and regular anemia checks. Meanwhile, for pregnant women, the importance of regular pregnancy check-ups, getting a blood test (TTD), getting additional food to prevent chronic energy deficiency (CED) is emphasized, and for newborns up to six months of age, it is recommended to get exclusive breastfeeding.

The Jepara district government also held training for integrated health post (Posyandu) cadres related to the preparation and production of supplementary food (PMT) from local products. The training is done to push food independence and family nutrition as well as it aims to reduce stunting rates in Jepara district. In addition, for toddlers affected by stunting, the government also provides additional protein food for toddlers and immunizations.

Socialization about stunting in pregnant and breastfeeding mothers continues to be carried out through integrated health posts (Posyandu) organized by the village. The Jepara district government also collaborates with institutions such as BAZNAS. In 2025, the Jepara district government partnered with BAZNAS to provide assistance under the Jepara Sehat program to children affected by stunting (Putri, 2025).

The Jepara district government continues to strive to reduce stunting rates. The district government is not only acting alone but also collaborating with various parties so that the stunting rate in Jepara can decrease rapidly.

The Impact of Early Marriage on Stunting

From various explanations it can be known that one of the causes of stunting in Jepara is early marriage. The number of stunting in Jepara is also decreasing along with the decreasing

number of marriage dispensation applications every year. This means that early marriage has more or less of an impact on stunting cases.

Pregnancy in teenagers has higher risk both for the mom and the baby in the womb. This is because the reproductive organs of adolescents are not fully ready because the healthy reproductive age for women is between 20-30 years. Pregnancy in teenagers carries the risk of causing complications during pregnancy and childbirth such as bleeding, premature birth, low birth weight, birth defects, uterine cancer, and even death of both the baby and the mother (Sekarayu & Nurawati, 2021).

Apart from disrupting physical health, teenage pregnancy can also disrupt mental health. Pregnancy in teenagers can trigger stress, anxiety, increase the risk of depression, emotional instability, and even suicide. Pregnancy in teenagers who are not ready can also trigger mothers and fathers to abandon or throw away their newborn children. However, on the other hand, teenage pregnancy also encourages teenagers to become more mature individuals (Lesinskien, Andruškevi, & Butvilait'e, 2025).

Early marriage has an impact on increasing cases of stunting. This is because it is possible that young couples do not really understand nutrition. The main reason is malnutrition or the lack of nutrition of children (Alza et al., 2023). Children who marry too young are generally not physically, mentally or economically ready to go through pregnancy and raise children. Mothers who become pregnant at an early age tend to be at risk of malnutrition, anemia, and lack of knowledge about maternal and child health. This condition has an impact on the growth and development of the fetus, so that the baby is more susceptible to being born with low birth weight and experiencing growth retardation. In addition, families who marry young often face economic limitations and limited access to health services, so that nutritional and child care needs are not optimally met. All these factors can trigger an increase in stunting rates in children.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that early marriage cases in Jepara remain quite high. This is evidenced by the number of marriage dispensation applications, which reached 1,325 over the past four years. Early marriage practices in Jepara are largely influenced by premarital pregnancy. Furthermore, cultural and economic factors also contribute to early marriage. Furthermore, stunting rates in Jepara remain quite high, despite a decline in recent years. The stunting rate in Jepara is influenced by several factors, including malnutrition among pregnant women and toddlers, mothers' lack of knowledge about children's nutritional needs, poor sanitation, low economic status, and early marriage. Early marriage can lead to stunting because teenage pregnancy carries significant risks, both for the mother and the baby. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy can also lead to mental health problems.

The results of this study are in line with research Mustajab & Indriani (2023) dan Yulius, Abidin, & Liliandriani (2020) which states that early marriage is one of the triggers of stunting. This is due to the young age of the mother. This study shows that children born to mothers under 19 years old are at higher risk of experiencing growth disorders. This is related to the mother's physical and nutritional unpreparedness. This study has similarities with the previous study because it examines the same thing, namely the impact of early marriage on stunting. However, this study focuses on a specific area, namely Jepara Regency. Furthermore, this study uses qualitative methods, in contrast to previous studies that used quantitative methods. The following are the differences between this study and previous studies.

Table 3. Comparison of the Author's Research with Previous Studies

Aspect	Mustajab & Indriani (2023)	Yulius, Abidin, & Liliandriani (2020)	Authors' (2026)
Location	Wonosobo	Wilayah kerja Puskesmas Tawalian	Jepara Regency
Methodology	Analytical survey with cross-sectional approach	<i>Cross Sectional</i>	Qualitative
Result	There is a significant relationship between child marriage and the	The mother's age at marriage, mother's knowledge and	Early marriage has significant influence toward the growth of

	incidence of stunting in toddlers.	exclusive breastfeeding are related to the incidence of stunting in toddlers in the Tawalian Community Health Center work area.	stunting in Jepara
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This research makes a significant contribution to the practice of early marriage. Furthermore, it also provides an understanding of stunting. The analysis shows that early marriage leads to early childbearing. This leads to physical and economic unpreparedness, and their limited knowledge about children disrupts their growth and development, leading to stunting.

The practical implication of this research is the need for local governments to educate applicants for age dispensations and the community about the importance of marrying within the government-determined age range. This is because the risks involved are less than those associated with early marriage. Furthermore, the academic implication of this marriage is to provide knowledge about the impact of early marriage on increasing stunting rates.

This study has limitations in its data sources. We used news and online data on early marriage and stunting. There have been no official interviews with relevant agencies, so the data is very limited. Therefore, further research is recommended to: 1) conduct interviews with relevant agencies. 2) conduct outreach and research in other areas. 3) interview parents of stunted children.

This research suggests several strategic steps that local governments can take. For example, opening courses for teenagers so they can develop their talents and interests. Providing free counseling services for teenagers who are still unsure about their life goals. Providing education to prospective parents about child growth and development.

CONCLUSION

Cases of early marriage in Jepara district are still relatively high. It is proven by the high number of marriage dispensation applications in 2025, which is 253 applications. Early marriage in Jepara is caused by many factors, including: premarital pregnancy, traditions (customs), economic problems, and low levels of education. Early marriage in Jepara is prevented by steps such as forming a community in society. Stunting is a case of malnutrition in children which is characterized by the child's height being below normal height. Stunting in Jepara is caused by a lack of nutrition in pregnant women and toddlers, parental knowledge about nutrition and parenting, poor sanitation, low economic levels, and early marriage. To overcome this, the Jepara health service is making various efforts and collaborating with other institutions. Early marriage has an impact on increasing cases of stunting in Jepara. It is because a young married couple isn't ready yet both physically and mentally to have a baby. Young couples also do not understand the nutrition needed by pregnant mom and baby.

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