Psychological Resilience as a Predictor of Burnout Levels in Parents of Children with Special Needs

Özel Gereksinimli Çocukların Ebeveynlerinde Tükenmişlik Düzeylerinin Yordayıcısı Olarak Psikolojik Dayanıklılık

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between psychological resilience and burnout among parents of children attending special education institutions. Prolonged stress in these parents often leads to burnout and depression, adversely affecting both parental well-being and child outcomes. The research involved 155 participants (103 mothers, 52 fathers), who completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Psychological Resilience Scale (PRS). The analysis focused on how resilience subdimensions self-perception, social competence, structural style, family cohesion, future perception, and social resources predict burnout components: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Results revealed that psychological resilience subdimensions collectively accounted for 15% of the variance in emotional exhaustion ($R^2 = .146$, p<.01), with social resources emerging as the sole significant individual predictor (p<.01). For depersonalization, resilience subdimensions explained 30% of the variance ($R^2 = .298$, p < .001), with structural style, family cohesion, social competence, and social resources serving as significant predictors (p<.05 to p< .001). These findings underscore psychological resilience as a protective factor against burnout, particularly highlighting the role of social resources in mitigating emotional exhaustion and multiple resilience components in reducing depersonalization. The study aligns with existing literature, emphasizing that enhancing parents' resilience especially through strengthening social networks, family cohesion, and adaptive coping strategies can buffer against burnout. Interventions targeting these resilience factors may improve parental mental health, thereby fostering more supportive environments for children with special needs. These insights advocate for integrating resilience-building programs into support systems for families in special education contexts, addressing both individual and relational dimensions of well-being.

Keywords: Parent, Psychological Resilience, Burnout.

Öz

Bu çalışma, özel eğitim kurumlarına devam eden çocukların ebeveynleri arasında psikolojik dayanıklılık ile tükenmişlik arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Bu ebeveynlerde uzun süreli stres genellikle tükenmişlik ve depresyona yol açarak hem ebeveynlerin iyilik halini hem de çocukların gelişimsel sonuçlarını olumsuz etkilemektedir. Araştırmaya 155 katılımcı (103 anne, 52 baba) dahil edilmiş olup, katılımcılar Maslach Tükenmişlik Envanteri ve Psikolojik Dayanıklılık Ölçeği'ni doldurmuştur. Analizler, dayanıklılığın alt boyutları olan benlik algısı, sosyal yeterlik, yapısal tarz, aile uyumu, gelecek algısı ve sosyal kaynakların, tükenmişliğin duygusal tükenme ve duyarsızlaşma bileşenlerini nasıl yordadığını incelemiştir. Sonuçlar, psikolojik dayanıklılık alt boyutlarının duygusal tükenme değişkenindeki varyansın %15'ini açıkladığını göstermiştir ($R^2 = .146$, p < .01). Alt boyutlar arasında yalnızca sosyal kaynaklar anlamlı bir yordayıcı olarak ortaya çıkmıştır (p < .01). Duyarsızlaşma için ise dayanıklılık alt boyutları varyansın %30'unu açıklamıştır ($R^2 = .298$, p < .001) ve yapısal tarz, aile uyumu, sosyal yeterlik ve sosyal kaynaklar anlamlı yordayıcılar olarak belirlenmiştir (p < .05 ile p < .001 arasında). Bu bulgular, psikolojik dayanıklılığın tükenmişliğe karşı koruyucu bir faktör olduğunu vurgulamakta; özellikle sosyal kaynakların duygusal tükenmeyi azaltmada, birden fazla dayanıklılık bileşeninin ise duyarsızlaşmayı azaltmada önemli rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, mevcut literatürle uyumlu olarak, ebeveynlerin dayanıklılığını artırmanın –özellikle sosyal ağları güçlendirme, aile uyumunu geliştirme ve uyumlu başa çıkma stratejilerini destekleme yoluyla– tükenmişliğe karşı koruyucu bir etki sağlayabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu dayanıklılık faktörlerine yönelik müdahaleler, ebeveynlerin ruh sağlığını iyileştirerek özel gereksinimli çocuklar için daha destekleyici ortamlar oluşturulmasına katkıda bulunabilir. Bu sonuçlar, dayanıklılık geliştirme programlarının özel eğitim bağlamındaki aile destek sistemlerine entegre edilmesini, bireysel ve ilişkisel iyi oluş boyutlarını birlikte ele alacak şekilde önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ebeveyn, Psikolojik Dayanıklılık, Tükenmişlik.

Introduction

Caring for children with special needs is an emotionally and physically demanding process for parents. Throughout this process, parents face multifaceted challenges, including access to healthcare services, educational support, social stigmatization, and financial burdens (Smith & Jones, 2018). According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), approximately 240 million children worldwide require support due to disabilities or special needs. This situation may lead parents to experience long-term psychological stress and adverse outcomes such as burnout syndrome (Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018). Burnout is a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, resulting from chronic stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout is more prevalent among parents of children with special needs due to the ongoing caregiving role and lack of social support (Sadziak, Wilinski & Wieczorek, 2019). For instance, a study conducted by Norlin and Broberg (2019) revealed that 65% of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder exhibited clinical levels of burnout symptoms. Similarly, a study conducted in Turkey found that 58% of parents of children with special needs experienced emotional exhaustion (Güler, Bedel & Çelik, 2022). However, not all parents are equally affected by this process. Some parents can adapt to stressors and mitigate burnout levels through psychological resilience (Southwick et al., 2016).

Psychological resilience is defined as a dynamic process that enables individuals to cope with difficulties, establish meaningful relationships, and adapt to change (Masten, 2018). This concept plays a crucial role in helping individuals under chronic stress mobilize their internal and external resources to maintain well-being (Ungar, 2021).

The literature on resilience levels among parents of children with special needs remains limited. Existing research predominantly focuses on risk factors associated with burnout (Silva et al., 2020) while inadequately addressing protective factors such as social support, self-efficacy, and coping strategies-key components of resilience (Thompson et al., 2019). For example, although Liu and Wang (2022) demonstrated that resilience training programs improved parents' stress management, the applicability of such interventions within the Turkish context remains uncertain. Additionally, how cultural factors shape the relationship between resilience and burnout has yet to be fully understood (Chen & Bonanno, 2020).

Psychological resilience is conceptualized as an adaptive process that mitigates the adverse effects of stress (Hunter, 2001). It is also described as an individual's capacity to recover from adversity, failure, and setbacks, and to regain their previous psychological state (Luthans, 2002). Several factors, including personality traits, skills, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, collectively shape psychological resilience. These factors can play either a positive or negative role in the stress management process and directly influence a parent's perspective on their child with special needs (Benson & Karlof, 2009).

Friborg et al. (2005) identified five key components in explaining the structure of psychological resilience: individual competence, social competence, family cohesion, social resources, and structured style. Individual competence refers to a person's self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-worth, and future aspirations. Social competence encompasses an individual's ability to adapt socially, extraversion, and willingness to engage in social activities. Structured style relates to the ability to maintain daily routines, plan, and organize tasks, while family cohesion reflects the harmony within the family and the support received from family members. Social resources refer to the support provided by close social circles, such as friends and relatives (Friborg et al., 2005).

Another significant consequence of the stress experienced by parents of children with special needs is burnout. Maslach defines burnout as a psychological syndrome that emerges in response to prolonged exposure to stress in a given environment, characterized by emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). When individuals are exposed to severe stressors, they may be unable to overcome the adverse effects, leading to burnout. Individual factors influencing burnout include gender, age, education level, marital status, work experience, social support, personality traits, and expectations, whereas family structure and social support constitute social factors (Bitmiş, Sökmen & Turgut, 2013). Maslach and Jackson (1981) conceptualized burnout as comprising three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to feeling emotionally drained due to work responsibilities; depersonalization is characterized by emotionally detached interactions with those receiving care or services; and reduced personal accomplishment manifests as feelings of inadequacy in one's professional role (Maslach & Leiter, 2008).

Parents of children with special needs may experience burnout due to difficulties in accepting their child's condition, feelings of helplessness and insecurity stemming from a lack of knowledge about the process, and unawareness of available social support resources, all of which negatively impact psychological resilience (Temel, 2015). A study by Dimala, et al. (2024) found that the type and severity of disability significantly influenced parental anxiety and burnout, particularly among mothers. The study also emphasized that these factors are critical contributors to burnout (Dimala, et al., 2024),. A review of the literature suggests that parents experience burnout due to the stress associated with caring for children with special needs (Kurban, 2019).

Low psychological resilience and high levels of burnout among parents of children with special needs negatively impact the child's well-being. In addition to experiencing positive emotions, parents often report feelings of fear, anxiety, concern, panic, anger, and fatigue throughout their child's development. Changes in family responsibilities and roles, coupled with a lack of information regarding how to support a newly diagnosed child, serve as significant stressors. Furthermore, parental burnout and the ongoing challenges they face contribute to a decline in overall quality of life. As parental responsibilities for a child with special needs increase, symptoms of burnout may become more pronounced. For example, research by Akün, Nuri, and Karabıyık (2022) found that parents of children attending inclusion classes experienced higher levels of burnout associated with unmet needs (burnout) (Nuri et al., 2022). Additionally, Avcanok and Nuri et al. (2025) reported that distress tolerance an aspect related to psychological resilience-varied significantly among parents of children with special needs, highlighting how coping resources can influence parental outcomes (Avcanok et al., 2025).

In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the number of parents with children with special needs is steadily increasing. However, no studies have been identified examining the relationship between burnout and psychological resilience levels in this context. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between burnout and psychological resilience levels among parents of children with special needs. It is anticipated that identifying this relationship will facilitate the provision of necessary support for parents, ultimately enhancing their integration into society.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between burnout and psychological resilience levels among parents whose children attend special education institutions. To achieve this goal, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Do the subdimensions of psychological resilience predict emotional exhaustion, a subdimension of burnout, among parents whose children attend special education institutions?

2. Do the subdimensions of psychological resilience predict depersonalization, a subdimension of burnout, among parents whose children attend special education institutions?

3. Do the subdimensions of psychological resilience predict personal accomplishment, a subdimension of burnout, among parents whose children attend special education institutions?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a correlational survey model to examine the relationship between burnout and psychological resilience levels among parents of children with special needs. Among general survey models, the correlational survey model aims to determine the existence and/or degree of a relationship between two or more variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Karasar, 2005).

Study Group

The study group consisted of 155 parents (mothers, n = 103, 66.5%; fathers, n = 52, 33.5%) of children with special needs enrolled in special education schools in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Participants were administered a Demographic Information Form, the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Parent Form, and the Psychological Resilience Scale.

Data Collection Instruments

Participants were provided with the Demographic Information Form, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Parent Form, and the Psychological Resilience Scale. The Demographic Information Form, developed by the researchers, included a question about the gender of the parents.

Maslach Burnout Inventory – Parent Form

In the Turkish adaptation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) by Ergin, the terms "people I encounter in my job" and "job" were modified to "my child" and "my child's care," following a similar approach to Pelsma, Roland, Tollefson, and Wigington's (1989) validation study of the MBI among mothers. The Turkish adaptation of the scale for parents was conducted by Duygun and Sezgin (2003). The original Turkish version of the MBI was used to assess burnout levels among teachers, while the adapted parent version was employed to measure parental burnout. While the version adapted by Duygun and Sezgin (2003) had a two-factor structure, the three-factor structure was confirmed in the Northern Cyprus sample. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was reported as 0.81. The inventory consists of 22 items and evaluates burnout across three dimensions. The scale was used in a five-point Likert format (0–

4) in this study. The Emotional Exhaustion dimension includes nine items, the Personal Accomplishment dimension comprises eight items, and the Depersonalization dimension consists of five items. Higher scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales, combined with lower scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale, indicate higher levels of burnout.

Psychological Resilience Scale

Friborg et al. (2005) developed the Psychological Resilience Scale to assess individuals' resilience levels in the workplace. In their study, Friborg et al. (2005) subdivided the "personal strength" dimension into "self-perception" and "future perception," resulting in a six-factor structure. The scale measures "structural style" and "future perception" with four items each, "family cohesion," "self-perception," and "social competence" with six items each, and "social resources" with seven items. The internal consistency coefficients obtained via structural equation modeling were reported as 0.80 for Self-Perception, 0.75 for Future Perception, 0.82 for Social Competence, 0.86 for Family Cohesion, 0.84 for Social Resources, and 0.76 for Structural Style.

Data Analysis

Participants were informed about the purpose and conduct of the research, and voluntary participation was ensured. The data obtained in the study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows 21.0. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the two variables. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive effect of psychological resilience on burnout.

Results

An examination of Table 1 reveals that the multiple regression analysis results indicate that the subdimensions of psychological resilience-structural style, future perception, family cohesion, self-perception, social competence, and social resources-collectively predict emotional exhaustion, R = .382, R^2 = .146, F(6,149) = 4.255, p < .01. It can be stated that psychological resilience accounts for 15% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. When analyzing which variable contributes to this variance, it was observed that only the Social Resources subdimension of psychological resilience significantly predicts emotional exhaustion (p<.01). The other subdimensions (structural style, future perception, family cohesion, self-perception, and social competence) were not found to be significant predictors of emotional exhaustion.

Table 1. Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion

Psychological Resilience	β	SE	B	t	p
Constant	14.874	6.514	-	2.283	.024
Structural Style	.188	.320	.054	.587	.558
Future Perception	-.413	.328	-.098	-1.259	.210
Family Cohesion	.226	.229	.096	.989	.324
Self-Perception	.439	.245	.147	1.789	.076
Social Competence	.366	.197	.157	1.857	.065
Social Resources	-.451	.134	-.266	-3.356	.001

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictors of Depersonalization

Psychological Resilience	β	SE	B	t	p
Constant	1.010	3.166		.319	.750
Structural Style	.338	.155	.182	2.172	.031
Future Perception	.190	.159	.085	1.196	.234
Family Cohesion	.264	.111	.209	2.374	.019
Self-Perception	-.109	.119	-.069	-.919	.360
Social Competence	.328	.096	.262	3.423	.001
Social Resources	-.240	.065	-.264	-3.673	.000

An examination of Table 2 reveals that the multiple regression analysis results indicate that the subdimensions of psychological resilience-structural style, future perception, family cohesion, self-perception, social competence, and social resources-collectively predict depersonalization, R=.546, R^2 = .289, $F_{(6,149)}$ = 10.532, p<.001. It can be stated that psychological resilience accounts for 29% of the variance in depersonalization. When analyzing which variables contribute to this variance, it was observed that the subdimensions of family cohesion and structural style (p < .05), social competence (p<.01), and social resources (p < .001) significantly predict depersonalization. However, the other subdimensions (future perception and self-perception) were not found to be significant predictors of depersonalization.

An examination of Table 3 reveals that the multiple regression analysis results indicate that the subdimensions of psychological resilience-structural style, future perception, family cohesion, self-perception, social competence, and social resources-collectively predict personal accomplishment, R = .377, R^2 =. 142, $F_{(6,149)}$ = 4.123, p<.001. It can be stated that psychological resilience accounts for 14% of the variance in personal accomplishment. When analyzing which variables contribute to this variance, it was observed that the subdimensions of social competence and social resources (p<.05), and social resources (p<.01) significantly predict personal accomplishment. However, the other subdimensions (structural style, future perception, and family cohesion) were not found to be significant predictors of personal accomplishment.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictors of Personal Achievement

Psychological Resilience	β	SS	B	t	P
Constant	21.730	5.287		4.110	.000
Structural Style	.402	.260	.143	1.549	.124
Future Perception	-.291	.266	-.085	-1.095	.275
Family Cohesion	-.250	.186	-.131	-1.347	.180
Self-Perception	.623	.199	.259	3.132	.002
Social Competence	-.362	.160	-.192	-2.262	.025
Social Resources	.232	.109	.169	2.125	.035

Discussion

Parents of children with special needs face various challenges, among which the most demanding is the caregiving responsibility for their child (Kaytez et al., 2015). Additionally, harmful behaviors exhibited by the child in social settings or discomfort due to the nature of the environment further strain families. The economic burden imposed by having a child with special needs, lack of sufficient information, tension within marital relationships, reduced participation in social activities and environments, and the attitudes of other members of society contribute to stress and emotional difficulties for these families (Nuri, 2019). Various studies have indicated that, due to these challenges, parents of children with special needs experience high levels of burnout. The predictive power of psychological resilience in relation to burnout underscores the importance of strengthening psychological resilience in services provided to these families.

First, multiple regression analysis revealed that general psychological resilience accounts for 15% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. However, when examining its subdimensions, only the "Social Resources" subdimension was found to have a significant predictive effect (p<.01). This finding suggests that among the components of psychological resilience, social support and environmental resources play a more decisive role in reducing individuals' levels of emotional exhaustion compared to other components (e.g., structural style, future perception, family cohesion, self-perception, and social competence). This result is supported by the literature. For instance, the study conducted by Maslach and Jackson (1981) identified lack of social support as a key determinant of burnout. Additionally, research by Zambrano-Chumo and Guevara (2024) and Buonomo et al. (2018) demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of social resources tend to experience lower levels of burnout. Social resources include elements such as support from friends, family, and colleagues, and the provision of such support plays a critical role in reducing emotional stress and enhancing psychological resilience. The fact that other subdimensions of psychological resilience did not show a significant effect on emotional exhaustion suggests that these factors are shaped not only by individual stress-coping strategies but also by the support of the social environment. Consequently, strengthening social support networks emerges as a crucial intervention strategy in reducing individuals' levels of emotional exhaustion (Nuri, Karabıyık, & Akün, 2022).

Findings from the study indicate that the subdimensions of psychological resilience family cohesion, structural style, social competence, and social resources significantly predict depersonalization. These results support the role of psychological resilience components in regulating emotional responses during the stress-coping process. The significant predictive effect of family cohesion particularly aligns with the literature, which emphasizes the critical role of family support mechanisms in managing emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Avcanok, Nuri, Bağlama, & Ruştioğlu, 2025). Similarly, the impact of social resources is consistent with studies highlighting the protective function of social support networks on psychological resilience (Ozbay et al., 2007). However, the non-significant relationship between future perception, self-perception, and depersonalization is noteworthy. This may indicate that these subdimensions are more closely associated with internal motivation or self-esteem rather than emotional disengagement (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006). For instance, the stronger association of future perception with psychological processes such as depression or anxiety could explain its lack of an expected effect in the context of depersonalization. The study's R^2 = .289 value suggests that psychological resilience factors explain approximately 29% of the variance in depersonalization, indicating a moderate explanatory power. This finding suggests that depersonalization is not solely related

to individual psychological resources but also influenced by environmental and contextual factors (e.g., workload, organizational stress) (Maslach et al., 2001).

Findings from the multiple regression analysis further indicate that the subdimensions of psychological resilience explain 14.2% of the variance in personal accomplishment, with social competence and social resources emerging as significant predictors. This suggests that individuals with stronger perceived social skills and supportive networks are more likely to achieve personal success. This result is consistent with the existing literature, which underscores the role of social resources in fostering resilience and goal attainment (Lee et al., 2020; Smith & Jones, 2018). The moderate effect size ($R^2 = .142$) indicates that while psychological resilience contributes to personal accomplishment, other factors such as personality traits, environmental conditions, and socioeconomic status also play significant roles (Masten, 2018). The non-significant relationships between structural style, future perception, family cohesion, and emotional exhaustion contrast with previous research suggesting that cognitive and familial factors serve as protective elements against burnout (Salsabila & Adrian, 2025). This discrepancy may stem from cultural or contextual differences in the sample, variations in measurement tools, or the specific conditions of the participants' environments. For instance, in contexts where individual autonomy is prioritized, social resources may play a more prominent role in reducing burnout compared to familial or cognitive factors (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

The finding that psychological resilience explains 15% of the variance in depersonalization highlights its protective role against emotional detachment. However, the non-significant contribution of certain subdimensions (e.g., future perception) suggests that resilience exerts varying effects on different dimensions of burnout. This result aligns with Maslach and Leiter's (2016) multidimensional burnout model, which posits that distinct factors influence different components of burnout, such as exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study suggest that, in general, resilience plays a significant role in reducing emotional exhaustion, with this effect primarily arising from the subdimension of social resources. In practice, strengthening social support systems may be an effective method for combating burnout in both professional and social life. The results of multiple regression analysis examined the impact of the subdimensions of psychological resilience on emotional exhaustion, and it was found that these variables explained 15% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. However, it was found that only social resources significantly predicted emotional exhaustion ($p<.01$). The other subdimensions (structural style, future perception, family cohesion, self-perception, social competence) did not have a significant impact on emotional exhaustion. This finding highlights the critical role of social support mechanisms in reducing individuals' levels of burnout. Based on these results, it is essential to create and strengthen supportive social networks for workers and individuals. Institutions can reduce emotional exhaustion levels of employees by implementing policies that improve social support systems. In particular, in stressful work environments, interventions such as mentoring programs, group therapies, or solidarity activities can increase individuals' access to social resources and prevent burnout. Trainings aimed at enhancing psychological resilience can be more effective when combined with programs focusing on social support mechanisms.

The subdimensions of psychological resilience have a significant impact on depersonalization, with 29% of the variance in depersonalization explained by psychological resilience. More specifically, family cohesion and structural style (p<.05), social competence (p<.01), and social resources (p<.001) emerged as significant predictors of depersonalization. However, it was determined that future perception and self-perception had no significant effect on depersonalization. These results indicate that an individual's harmony with their family, a structured lifestyle, strong social skills, and supportive social resources are critical factors in reducing depersonalization. Particularly, the finding that social resources are the strongest predictor underscores the protective role of social support in the burnout process and highlights its importance in reducing individuals' levels of depersonalization. Workshops aimed at increasing individuals' social competence, communication skills training, and team-building activities can be organized. In particular, programs that enhance empathy and strengthen social solidarity should be implemented in workplaces. Organizational programs that enhance psychological resilience (e.g., flexible working hours, burnout prevention programs) should be applied to reduce employees' levels of depersonalization.

The impact of the subdimensions of psychological resilience on personal accomplishment was examined, and it was found that 14.2% of the variance in personal accomplishment was explained by psychological resilience. Specifically, social competence (p<.05) and social resources (p<.01) were identified as significant predictors of personal accomplishment. However, structural style, future perception, and family cohesion did not have a significant effect on personal accomplishment. These findings suggest that possessing strong social skills and access to supportive social resources are key factors in enhancing personal accomplishment. Social competence enables individuals to communicate effectively and collaborate, while social resources provide motivation and support mechanisms that foster success. Mentorship and coaching programs should be widely implemented in workplaces and educational settings. Support groups, professional networks, and community-based events can be established to increase access to social resources for employees and students. Further comprehensive studies examining other factors influencing personal accomplishment (e.g., motivation, personality traits, socioeconomic status) can be conducted. Longitudinal studies may analyze the effects of social competence and social resources over time.

Declarations

*Plagiarism Checks***:** Yes- Turnitin

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