

THE NDACAN

# UPDATE

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Family Life Development Center, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University

## Using AFCARS to Study Relationships Between Children's Developmental and Medical Conditions and Foster Care Outcomes

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**N**DACAN provides data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) to researchers. The AFCARS is a federally mandated data collection system containing case-level information on all children protected by Title IV-B/E of the Social Security Act. Under AFCARS, participating states collect data on all children in foster care for whom the state child welfare agency has responsibility for placement, care, or supervision. In addition, states collect data on all adopted children placed by the state's child welfare agency or private agencies under contract with the child welfare agency.

The use of administrative data, such as those provided by AFCARS, has become increasingly common in the study of how children are managed within child welfare services. Administrative databases possess advantages for child welfare research. They offer investigators the opportunity to address questions about child characteristics and outcomes using data for entire populations of children served by child welfare systems. Such data are relatively inexpensive for the investigator to obtain and are provided in files that are easily read using basic statistical packages such as SAS or SPSS. Moreover, administrative data systems such as AFCARS surpass survey methods with respect to the collection of difficult-to-obtain information. Using survey research methods, it might be difficult to obtain interviews with parents involved in the child welfare

system, and these parents might be unable to provide complete information about the services their children received. In addition, biological parents might be reluctant to discuss the removal of their children, and adoptive parents might not know the details of their adoptive children's foster care placements.

In the present research, we used AFCARS data to identify children who received foster care services, and to investigate patterns of service utilization as a function of the health and developmental status of the child and substance abuse status of the parents. It should be noted that, like most administrative datasets, the AFCARS dataset has significant limitations due to problems of data completeness and accuracy. These limitations make it unlikely that data from AFCARS will provide definitive answers to our research questions. Instead, we argue that these data allow us to conduct an exploratory study that provides a basis for further research.

At the JFK Partners of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, we have been investigating the service needs of young children with disabilities. As part of this work, we used

AFCARS data to assess the extent to which developmental risk factors and parental substance abuse influence the course of out-of-home placements for children under three years of age. The AFCARS dataset contains child characteristics including race, gender, age, and disability conditions. The dataset also contains information on parental alcohol and drug abuse, foster care payments, whether children return to their parents after discharge from foster care, and out-of-home placement dates. The AFCARS dataset does not contain information about parent income, education or occupation. Specifications of each data element in the AFCARS dataset are provided to researchers in an accompanying reporting manual available from NDACAN.

In this paper we illustrate the use of AFCARS data with analyses that address two questions about child welfare outcomes in relation to children's developmental-medical conditions and parental substance abuse. These questions concern the duration of the last out-of-home placement, and whether children were returned to their parents at discharge from foster care.

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### Call for Datasets

**The Archive is continually looking for datasets that would be valuable additions to its holdings. Criteria for selection include methodological rigor, scope, relevance and technical quality. If you have data or know of data that would be particularly beneficial to other child maltreatment researchers, please contact us.**

## Archive News

### Web Site Award

The NDACAN Web site has received a rating of excellent from the Tufts University Child and Family WebGuide. The goal of the WebGuide is to evaluate Web sites that contain research-based information about child development and to provide the public with easy access to the most informative and credible child development information on the Web. The WebGuide can be found at [www.cfw.tufts.edu](http://www.cfw.tufts.edu).

### CMRL E-Mail List Information

Since 1993, NDACAN has operated the Child Maltreatment Research electronic mailing list (CMRL) to encourage information exchange and networking among researchers in the field of child abuse and neglect. It currently has about 1,000 subscribers from all over the world

and is carefully moderated for appropriate content.

The scope of the discussion includes all areas of child maltreatment research (e.g., epidemiology, etiology, prevention, consequences, intervention, and treatment) and the full range of research issues (e.g., measurement, instrumentation, statistical analysis, and ethics). The list is not open to discussions of program or clinical issues except as they relate to research. To subscribe to the CMRL, send an e-mail message from the address that will receive the postings to [listproc@cornell.edu](mailto:listproc@cornell.edu) containing only the following line:

subscribe Child-Maltreatment-Research-L Fname Lname

Replace Fname and Lname with your first and last names. To unsubscribe from the list, send an e-mail message from the address to be removed to [listproc@cornell.edu](mailto:listproc@cornell.edu) containing only

the following line:

unsubscribe Child-Maltreatment-Research-L

All postings to the CMRL mailing list since its inception are available for viewing on the NDACAN Web site.

### Summer Research Institute 2003

**The next NDACAN Summer Research Institute (SRI) has been scheduled for May 27 – May 31, 2003. Applications for the 2003 SRI will be available in September 2002. Fourteen applicants will be selected. Except for the cost of travel, most expenses will be paid by NDACAN. Diversity scholarships will be available to pay the travel expenses of a small number of participants. To download or review the application, please visit our Web site ([www.ndacan.cornell.edu](http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu)) or e-mail [NDACAN@cornell.edu](mailto:NDACAN@cornell.edu).**

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*Layout by Andrés Arroyo*

## Other Resources for Child Abuse and Neglect Researchers

### The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

The Clearinghouse is a national resource center for professionals seeking information on the prevention, identification, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. Among other things, the Clearinghouse maintains a database of publications, audiovisual materials, services, programs, excerpts of state statutes, and ongoing research projects relevant to child maltreatment. The Clearinghouse is a service of the Children's Bureau.

Phone: 1-800-FYI-3366

E-Mail: [nccanch@calib.com](mailto:nccanch@calib.com)

Web site: [www.calib.com/nccanch](http://www.calib.com/nccanch)

### The Children's Bureau

The Children's Bureau is the oldest federal agency for children and is located within the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. The Bureau seeks to provide for the safety, permanency and well-being of children through leadership, support for necessary services, and productive partnerships with states, tribes and communities. The Bureau is a major funder of research examining the causes, treatment, and prevention of child maltreatment. The Web site provides a great deal of information regarding Bureau programs, federal laws, and

major data collection efforts. **Child Maltreatment and other federal reports can be accessed from the site.**

Web site: [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/)

### National Data Analysis System (NDAS)

The Child Welfare League of America, in cooperation with state child welfare agencies, has created the nation's first comprehensive, interactive child welfare database, the National Data Analysis System (NDAS). The NDAS puts child welfare statistics at the fingertips of Internet users, creating customized tables and graphs and providing information and links necessary to understand the data. Data are available in the areas of child abuse and neglect, adoption and foster care, fiscal expenditures, and child welfare administration.

Web site: <http://ndas.cwla.org>.

### Child Trends DataBank

The Child Trends DataBank provides the latest trends on over 70 indicators of child and youth well-being. National estimates are provided and updated frequently. The indicators are presented with plain language summaries and cover the domains of health, social and emotional development, income and work, education, demographics, and family and community.

Web site: [www.childtrendsdatbank.org](http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org)

# Using AFCARS to Study Relationships Between Children's Developmental and Medical Conditions and Foster Care Outcomes

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## RESULTS

### Sample Characteristics

The study sample included all children under the age of three in the AFCARS database in 1999 (version 1). Forty-seven states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico submitted data to the AFCARS. The total number of children in this study sample was 105,071.

For this research four non-overlapping groups of children were established based on AFCARS variables. These groups included: 1) children for whom no developmental-medical conditions or parental substance abuse were reported; 2) children reported to have one or more developmental or medical conditions but no parental substance abuse; 3) children reported to have parental substance abuse but no developmental or medical condition; and 4) children reported to have one or more developmental or medical conditions and a substance abusing parent. The percentages of children in these four categories are presented in the figure. Eleven percent of the children in our sample were identified as having developmental or medical conditions (Groups 2 and 4). For 22 percent of our sample parental substance abuse was a reason for removal to foster care (Groups 3 and 4).

### Duration of Out-of-Home Placements

The duration of out-of-home stays was computed for the 31,849 children whose placements ended during 1999. Analysis of variance indicated statistically

significant differences for length of stay among the groups ( $F=123.25$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Children with developmental-medical conditions (10.1 months), children with parental substance abuse (9.6 months), and children who had both sets of problems (12.7 months) had longer out-of-home stays than did children without these risk factors (8.4 months).

### Reunification with Parents at Discharge from Foster Care

Overall, children with identified risks were less likely to reside with their parents at discharge from foster care. Children with developmental-medical conditions and children with parental substance abuse were less likely than unaffected children to return to their parents at the close of services (51.5% and 54.0% respectively). Children with both developmental-medical conditions and parental substance abuse were the least likely to return to their parents at the close of services (32% versus 64% for the unaffected group).

## DISCUSSION

These results indicate that children with health-developmental problems and/or parental substance abuse have less satisfactory foster care outcomes than do their unaffected peers. Specifically, they are in foster care longer and have a smaller likelihood of reunification with parents. The present research illustrates the utility of the AFCARS data, as it would be difficult to find an alternative source of national informa-

tion about child welfare outcomes for very young children with health and developmental problems.

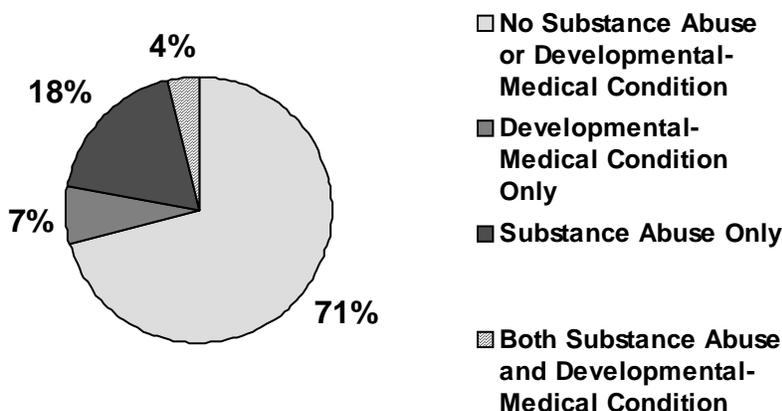
Despite their utility, data from the AFCARS have significant limitations of which users need to be aware. Users of AFCARS data must perform careful data checks to detect problems with invalid data. Such problems may involve impossible values, or extreme outliers, such as durations of foster care that exceed the child's age.

An analytical issue of which researchers should be cautious concerns estimating the prevalence of developmental-medical problems based on AFCARS data. In 1999, 11 states reported to the AFCARS that less than 5 percent of their foster children under age three had developmental-medical problems. Such low levels are well below estimates provided in studies of foster children and should be regarded skeptically. Indeed, current reports suggest that the incidence of significant developmental and health problems among children in foster care may be as high as 65 percent. The low estimate of developmental-medical problems provided by the AFCARS suggests that efforts to improve reporting by the states will contribute to better data quality in the future.

Finally, AFCARS data are limited in that they only indicate whether a developmental or medical condition exists for a particular child, but do not provide information as to the severity of developmental and medical problems. Further research should address whether the conditions identified in the AFCARS are in fact reliable indicators of medical and developmental problems. In addition, better estimates are needed of the incidence and severity of developmental problems among children in child welfare. Such research would require actual assessment of children in child welfare to determine their developmental status. Developmental assessment of a representative sample of children in child welfare will help to establish the rate of developmental problems for this population of children.

*This work has been supported in part by grants from the U.S. Department of Education, OSEP, U.S. Department of Education Project #H324T990026 and Maternal and Child Health Bureau #6T73MC00011-05. Questions should be directed to Steven Rosenberg, Ph.D. (phone: 303-315-0178, e-mail: Steven.Rosenberg@UCHSC.edu).*

**Foster Care Children Age 0 - 3 Classified by Risk Characteristics**



## Child Maltreatment Researchers Convene at 10th Annual Summer Research Institute

By Susan Lang

*This article originally appeared in the Cornell Chronicle on June 6, 2002.*

**H**ow does a mother's depression affect her children's behavior over time? What motivates a foster parent to care for a child with serious psychosocial problems? Why do some cases of child abuse result in the death of a child?

To delve into these and similar issues, 13 visiting U.S. researchers concerned with child maltreatment attended the 10th annual Summer Research Institute (SRI) on Cornell's campus, May 28 to June 2.

The participants, ranging from graduate students to senior research faculty at major academic institutions, tapped the expertise of Cornell child abuse experts and attended specialized colloquia. They also benefited from hands-on computing time with Cornell consult-

ants to exploit the extensive databases of the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) at Cornell. The Archive has about three dozen data sets, including those on child abuse and neglect, child and adolescent well-being, adoption and foster care, parenting among women sexually abused in childhood, decision-making in child protective services, assessing children's testimonial competence, foster parents, runaway and homeless youth and family violence.

"Participants for the SRI are selected on a competitive basis from a wide variety of disciplines, including psychology, social work and medicine," said John Eckenrode, Professor and Chair of the Human Development Department at Cornell and Director of NDACAN. "Over the years, the SRI has brought about 115 scholars to campus. They all have a common goal of understanding the causes and consequences of child

maltreatment."

Each SRI participant arrives at Cornell with a preliminary research project and receives help in refining research plans, and resolving technical problems and statistical analysis issues. The agenda includes workshops and research presentations on topics such as longitudinal data analysis and logistic regression, as well as extensive computer time. This year's keynote speakers included Eckenrode and Christine Cox, a researcher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

NDACAN provides an inexpensive and scientifically productive way for researchers to explore important issues in the child maltreatment field. NDACAN is a project of the Family Life Development Center in Cornell's College of Human Ecology. Funding is provided by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## New Datasets Available from NDACAN

### **A Comparative Study of the Use and Effectiveness of Different Risk Assessment Models in CPS Decision Making Processes**

**Dataset Number: 84**

**Principal Investigator: Baird, C.**

Description: This study was a three-year project conducted by the Children's Research Center and funded by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. The central objective of this study was to determine the relative validity and reliability of three different risk assessment systems used in Child Protective Services (CPS). The three risk assessment instruments evaluated in this study were the Washington Risk Assessment Matrix, the California Family Assessment Factor Analysis, and the Michigan Structured Decision Making System's Family Risk Assessment of Abuse and Neglect. Both the Washington and the California models are consensus-based assessment systems, while the Michigan model is an actuarial instrument developed from empirical studies of child maltreatment.

Data were collected in four states: California, Florida, Missouri, and Michigan. The vast majority of cases in this study came from urban settings. In total, 1,477 families constituted the validity study sample. All were investigated in the fall

of 1995 or early 1996. Outcome information was collected over an 18-month follow-up period and included rates of subsequent investigations, substantiations, and placements in out-of-home care. The sample for the reliability component of the research consisted of 20 cases per site for a total of 80 reliability study sample cases. Each of the three assessment systems was applied by four different raters so that the reliability of assigning risk classification categories could be evaluated.

### **Children's Eyewitness Reports After Exposure to Misinformation from Parents**

**Dataset Number: 88**

**Principal Investigator: Poole, D.**

Description: This study examined how misleading suggestions from parents influenced children's eyewitness reports. Children (3 to 8 years old) participated in science demonstrations, listened to their parents read a story that described experienced and non-experienced events, and subsequently discussed the science experience in two follow-up interviews. Many children described fictitious events in response to open-ended prompts, and there were no age differences in suggestibility during this phase of the interview. Accu-

racy declined markedly in response to direct questions, especially for the younger children. Although the older children retracted many of their false reports after receiving source-monitoring instructions, the younger children did not. Path analyses indicated that acquiescence, free recall, and source monitoring all contribute to mediating patterns of suggestibility across age. Results indicate that judgments about the accuracy of children's testimony must consider the possibility of exposure to misinformation prior to formal interviews.

### **National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), Detailed Case Data Component, 1998 and 1999**

**Dataset Numbers: 89 and 90**  
**Principal Investigator: Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Description: The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is a voluntary national data collection and analysis system created in response to the requirements of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. The Detailed Case Data Component (DCDC) of the NCANDS consists of data at the report level for all child pro-

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## Forthcoming Datasets from NDACAN

### **Sexual Abuse of Females: Effects in Adolescence**

**Dataset Number: 95**

**Principal Investigator: Trickett, P.**

Description: The study is a continuation of a longitudinal study of the psychobiological impact of sexual abuse on female development. In this study, 84 females who had been abused by a family member, the girls' non-abusing mothers, 82 demographically similar non-abused females, and their mothers were evaluated at yearly intervals when the girls were median age 11, 12, 13, and then again at age 16. The main objectives of this research were to: 1) better understand the relationship between child sexual abuse and adverse psychological development in childhood and adolescence; 2) better indicate how a child's stage of development is related to the psychological impact of abuse; 3) improve understanding of how child sexual abuse adversely affects some girls more than others, and how prior

development of competence and family and peer support can attenuate negative outcomes; 4) provide evidence for (or against) hypotheses that child sexual abuse causes hormonal changes that contribute to the development of adjustment and behavioral problems; 5) show whether or not sexual abuse of children is associated with the timing of entry into and passage through puberty; and 6) to work toward a multivariate theory of the consequences of child sexual abuse that integrates developmental and psychobiological perspectives.

Assessment of the psychological development of the subjects at age 16 focused on two broad domains. In the first domain are important indicators of competent and active coping with the developmental tasks of the passage through adolescence, including indicators of self-esteem, body image, perceived social competence, interpersonal competence, sense of control, school

achievement and behavior, and attitudes about sexual maturation. In the second domain are indicators of psychiatric symptoms and behavior problems, with a focus on the presence of depression, aggression, sexual problems, and dissociation. Additional measures of self-reported delinquency, sexual activity, educational and occupational attainment and/or attenuation, and interpersonal relationships have been added. Physical development measures include assessment of pubertal status, saliva samples for hormonal assays, height, weight, blood pressure, and pulse.

### **An Ecological Developmental Perspective on the Consequences of Child Maltreatment**

**Dataset Number: 96**

**Principal Investigator: Cicchetti, D.**

Description: The study examines the links among child maltreatment, vari-

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## New Datasets Available from NDACAN

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protective services investigations in the participating states. For the majority of states, information on substantiated and unsubstantiated reports is available. Data concerning the source of the report, the outcome of the investigation, the characteristics of the child and the caregiver, the delivery of services, and the type of the maltreatment are available. Although perpetrator and child fatality information is collected in the DCDC, these data are not available in the publicly available datasets.

### **National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), Summary Data Component, 1990 - 1999**

**Dataset Numbers: 93**

**Principal Investigator: Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Description: The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is a voluntary national data collection and analysis system created in response to the requirements of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. The Summary Data Component (SDC) collects state-level data through an annual survey of the states. The SDC survey asks states to report the number of reports and investigations in a given calendar

year, the number of victims of child maltreatment overall and by major type, the number of fatalities resulting from maltreatment, and other information. All states participate in the SDC to at least some degree. The dataset available from NDACAN is a compilation of all years between 1990 and 1999.

### **Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS), 1999**

**Dataset Number: 91**

**Principal Investigator: Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Description: The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is the first federally mandated data collection system intended to provide case specific information on all children covered by the protections of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act (Section 427). Under the final AFCARS rules, states are required to collect case specific data on all children in foster care for whom the state child welfare agency has responsibility for placement, care, or supervision. States are also required to collect data on all adopted children who were placed by the state child welfare agency or by private agencies under contract with the public child welfare agency. They are encouraged but not re-

quired to report private adoptions that are finalized in the state. The AFCARS data are designed to address policy development and program management issues at both the state and federal levels. They are also useful for researchers interested in analyzing aspects of the United States' foster care and adoption programs. Tables summarizing the AFCARS data are available from the Children's Bureau home page on the Web: [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/).

### **Neighborhood and Household Factors in the Etiology of Child Maltreatment**

**Dataset Number: 94**

**Principal Investigator: Korbin, J.**

Description: The study was a four-year project conducted by the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change at Case Western Reserve University, and funded by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. The quantitative component of the study, which is available from NDACAN, examined the relationship between neighborhood social structure and child maltreatment. Parents (n=400) of children under 18 were systematically selected from 20

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## Forthcoming Datasets from NDACAN

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ous environmental conditions, and developmental outcomes. An ecological developmental model provided the theoretical framework for the design, measurement, and data analytic strategies utilized. The study had three parts. In Part I, the authors investigated the links among the factors of community violence, domestic violence, poverty, and multiple dimensions of child maltreatment. In Part II, the investigators examined the links between child maltreatment and various developmental outcomes in children. Finally, in accord with a developmental-transactional perspective, the interaction of child maltreatment with other environmental conditions shaping the children's developmental paths and their subsequent

adaptation was examined in Part III.

Data about the children's adaptation and current symptomatology were collected during a summer camp program. Each child's primary caregiver was interviewed during home visits conducted concurrently with the child's first camp attendance. The children's history of maltreatment was scored from DSS records. Follow-up data were collected on the child participants during their attendance at summer camp the following year. Fifty-six percent of the child participants had been identified by the county's department of social services as legally maltreated. The non-maltreated comparison children were demographically similar; overall, the sample was ethnically diverse and came

from lower socioeconomic strata.

### **Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS), 2000**

**Dataset Number: 97**

**Principal Investigator: Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Description: See AFCARS 1999 in *New Datasets* for a full description. Beginning with the 2000 data, race codes have been changed to comply with federal guidelines allowing the selection of multiple races. Six yes/no variables, corresponding to the major race categories tracked in AFCARS have been added. Prior to 2000, race was captured in a single variable with five mutually exclusive values.

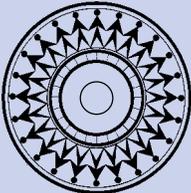
## New Datasets Available from NDACAN

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Census-defined block groups with different child maltreatment report rates. Using findings from an ethnographic component of the study, the investigators developed and administered four scales intended to measure the processes by which neighborhood structural characteristics might affect child

maltreatment. Scales of neighborhood quality and neighborhood facilities were intended to measure community resources, while scales of disorder and deterioration, and lack of control of children were intended to measure social control. Structural measures included Census demographic data, which were

subjected to factor analysis to produce the factors of impoverishment, instability, and child care burden. Maltreatment measures included parents' responses to the Child Abuse Potential (CAP) Inventory and official neighborhood rates for child maltreatment reports.



***The mission of the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) is to facilitate the secondary analysis of research data relevant to the study of child abuse and neglect. By making data available to a larger number of researchers, NDACAN seeks to provide a relatively inexpensive and scientifically productive means for researchers to explore important issues in the child maltreatment field.***

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