

EFFECTS OF ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS AND SOLUTION-FOCUSED THERAPIES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG TEACHERS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Marital conflict is a significant relational challenge that can negatively affect the emotional well-being, communication, and stability of couples. Among married teachers, occupational demands, financial pressures, work-family imbalance, poor communication, and other interpersonal challenges may contribute to marital conflict and create a need for effective counselling interventions. This study examined the effects of Assertiveness Skills Training (AST) and Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) on the management of marital conflict among married secondary school teachers in Kwara State, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental design was adopted. Sixty married teachers who met the selection criteria were purposively selected and assigned to three groups: Assertiveness Skills Training (n = 20), Solution-Focused Therapy (n = 20), and control (n = 20). The interventions were administered for eight weeks, with one 50-minute session conducted weekly. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance. Findings revealed a significant main effect of treatment on marital conflict, $F(1, 50) = 83.056$, $p < .001$. Both AST and SFT groups recorded substantially lower post-intervention marital conflict than the control group. Although SFT produced the lowest estimated marginal mean (28.52), compared with AST (34.30), the difference between the two treatment groups was not statistically significant ($p = .638$). Gender also had a significant main effect while age did not. A significant treatment-by-gender interaction was observed, whereas the treatment-by-age interaction was not significant. The study concludes that both AST and SFT are useful counselling approaches for managing marital conflict among married teachers. Counsellors should consider integrating assertiveness and solution-focused strategies into marriage counselling programmes for teachers.

Keywords: marital conflict, Assertiveness Skills Training, Solution-Focused Therapy, gender & age

Introduction

Marital conflict refers broadly to disagreement, tension or incompatibility between spouses concerning needs, expectations, values, responsibilities, communication and other aspects of marital life. Marriage in Nigeria is more than a private union between two individuals; it is a social institution that intertwines families, communities, and traditions (Sunmonu et al., 2025). Although conflict is a natural and inevitable aspect of marital interaction, its continuation and mismanagement can lead to serious consequences such as emotional distress, reduced marital satisfaction, and, in extreme cases, separation or divorce (Nwanosike et al., 2025; Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2014).

These occupational demands may compete with family responsibilities and available time for spouses. Consequently, difficulties in communication, financial management, parenting, allocation of household responsibilities and emotional support may become more difficult to manage. Recent Nigerian evidence reinforces the importance of examining marital conflict within professional and cultural contexts. Ogungbemi et al. (2024), studying newly married couples in Ilorin, Kwara State, identified friends' interference in marital affairs, poor family background and inadequate parenting skills among prominent factors associated with marital conflict. Their study also found no significant differences in the identified factors based on gender, age or educational qualification. Similarly, recent research involving teachers in Kwara State has demonstrated the importance of counselling interventions in addressing marital and relational difficulties. Abdulkareem and Lasis (2024), for example, investigated Imago Relationship Therapy among married teachers in Kwara State using a pretest-posttest control-group design involving 60 participants.

Yusuf and Abdulkareem (2024) also reviewed dimensions of marital satisfaction among married teachers in Kwara State, highlighting communication, emotional health, interpersonal understanding and conflict resolution as important dimensions of marital functioning. Persistent marital conflict may undermine emotional stability, interpersonal relationships and family functioning. For teachers, unresolved marital difficulties may also interact with occupational stress and potentially affect concentration, job satisfaction and professional functioning. However, all these unresolved conflict, poor communication, and emotional disengagement are common pathways to marital dissatisfaction (Sunmonu et al., 2026). As a marriage progresses, couples may encounter additional stressors, such as parenting responsibilities, financial obligations, and career demands. Despite the relevance of marital counselling, there remains a need for contextually relevant evidence concerning interventions that can assist teachers to manage marital conflict constructively. The study therefore examined whether AST and SFT could significantly reduce marital conflict among selected married secondary school teachers and whether their outcomes differed according to participants' gender and age.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to establish the effectiveness of Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy in the Management of Marital Conflict among Married Teachers in Kwara State. The specific purposes of this study include the following:

1. evaluate the main effects of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State;
2. determine the main effect of age in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State;
3. assess the main effect of gender in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State;

4. examine the interaction effects of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) and age in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State;
5. evaluate the interaction effects of (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) treatment and gender in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State;
6. determine the interaction effects of age and gender in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State; and
7. assess the interaction effects of (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) treatment, age and gender in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05:

1. There is no significant main effect of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.
2. There is no significant main effect of age on the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.
3. There is no significant main effect of gender on the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.
4. There are no significant interaction effects of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) and age in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.
5. There is no significant interaction effect of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) and gender in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.
6. There is no significant interaction effect of age and gender in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.
7. There are no significant interaction effects of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy), age and gender in the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, marital conflict is hinged on several established frameworks such as Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) and Assertiveness Skills Training. Solution-Focused Therapy Intervention, propounded by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg in 1982, is a practical and empowering counseling approach that encourages clients to look forward rather than backward. Research indicates that the primary objective of SFT is to help clients focus on what they can do effectively, what resources they possess, and what they have done effectively in the past (Pirmoradi et al., 2023). Furthermore, SFT significantly improves marital communication and reduces emotional distress among couples experiencing conflict (Adeyemi & Ibrahim, 2022). In other words, the brevity and goal-directed nature of SFT make it a practical and cost-effective intervention, particularly for couples experiencing high levels of stress or conflict. By prioritizing actionable solutions and encouraging adaptive behaviors, SFT not only addresses immediate relational issues but also contributes to long-term marital stability and overall well-being.

Therefore, Solution-Focused Therapy represents a valuable therapeutic approach for promoting positive change and resolving conflicts within marital relationships (Burgess & Locke, 2018 — verify: source does not appear to discuss SFT). Similarly, Assertiveness Skills Training was pioneered by Andrew Salter in the 1940s. The approach focuses on helping individuals express

their thoughts, feelings, needs, rights, and boundaries appropriately and respectfully without being passive or aggressive. Research on communication interventions, including assertiveness training, consistently identifies active listening as a predictor of positive interaction outcomes and interpersonal closeness (Therapeak, 2025; Samfira, 2020). In this way, communication skills in assertiveness training are not just about expressing one's own needs but also about facilitating two-way dialogue that supports understanding and respect. Therefore, Assertiveness Skills Training provides a practical counselling mechanism through which the findings of the study can be translated into intervention. It can focus on respectful self-expression, active listening, boundary setting, negotiation, constructive disagreement, emotional regulation, and problem-solving. These skills are consistent with the study's recommendation for structured premarital and ongoing marital counselling, particularly interventions addressing conflict resolution and adjustment.

Empirical Review

Empirically, recent Nigerian evidence supports its relevance to marital conflict. Abdullahi and Bala (2024) investigated assertiveness and discipline training among married female students at Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto. Using a quasi-experimental design involving 36 participants across intervention and control groups, the researchers reported significant reductions in marital conflict in the intervention groups. The assertiveness group demonstrated particularly notable improvement in communication and relationship-related outcomes.

Abdullahi and Abubakar (2025) subsequently examined assertiveness counselling among married female students at Sokoto State University. Their eight-week intervention produced statistically significant improvements in financial stress, academic stress and communication-related difficulties, providing further evidence that assertiveness-oriented counselling can address interpersonal and role-related stressors associated with marital functioning. These studies are relevant to the present investigation because they provide Nigerian evidence that structured assertiveness interventions can equip married individuals with practical communication and interpersonal skills.

In addition, Vermeulen-Oskam et al. (2024) conducted a three-level meta-analysis involving 72 studies and 489 effect sizes. The overall effect of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy on psychosocial problems was large ($g = 1.17$). Particularly large effects were reported among couples and for marital functioning, both with an effect size of $g = 3.02$. Furthermore, Naseh (2025) conducted a systematic review of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy for couple dyadic relationships in Iran. The review included 26 randomised controlled trials involving 1,110 participants and reported medium-to-large effects on marital outcomes including dyadic adjustment, marital satisfaction and intimacy.

Amiri et al. (2025) compared Acceptance and Commitment Therapy with Solution-Focused Therapy among couples experiencing marital conflicts. Both approaches improved marital quality of life and sexual communication intelligence, although ACT demonstrated greater effects on the examined outcomes. This finding is important because it suggests that SFT is beneficial while also demonstrating that comparative effectiveness depends on the outcome and therapeutic model being examined. Lastly, Faraydoni Golyan et al. (2025) compared Solution-Focused Narrative Therapy with Solution-Focused Therapy among couples experiencing conflict, providing additional evidence concerning the applicability of solution-oriented interventions to couple functioning.

Teacher-specific evidence also demonstrates the relevance of marital counselling. Uwasomba and Ogazie (2025), studying 157 married primary-school teachers in Umuahia North Education Zone, identified external intimate relationships, financial difficulties, limited family

time, child-related concerns, communication problems and interference from parents-in-law among reported causes of marital conflict. The researchers reported negative effects of marital conflict on married teachers and recommended counselling interventions. Additionally, Obanyedo (2025), studying married teachers in Delta State, examined educational background, gender and duration of marriage as predictors of marital adjustment. Educational background and gender were not significantly related to marital adjustment, whereas duration of marriage showed a significant relationship.

In kwara State, Abdulkareem and Lasis (2024) reported the use of Imago Relationship Therapy with 60 married teachers, further demonstrating the growing application of structured therapeutic interventions to teacher marital difficulties. The geographical relevance of recent evidence is particularly important. Ogungbemi et al. (2024) examined marital conflict among newly married couples in Ilorin and identified interference from friends, poor family background and inadequate parenting skills among important conflict-related factors.

In addition, Adegboyega et al. (2026) investigated marital conflict resolution in Kwara State using Schema Therapy and Mutual Behaviour Analysis. The study reported significant reductions in marital conflict and improvements in self-differentiation, with the combined intervention producing the strongest outcome. Collectively, these studies demonstrate an expanding evidence base for counselling interventions targeting marital conflict in Kwara State and Nigeria. However, the specific comparison between Assertiveness Skills Training and Solution-Focused Therapy among married secondary school teachers remains insufficiently documented.

Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design involving pre-test post-test control group design. The 3 x 2 x 2 factorial matrix. The population of this study were all 17,439 teachers in Kwara State Nigeria (Kwara State Ministry of Education and Human Capital Development, 2022/2023). Three Local Government Areas in Kwara State were purposefully selected to keep the intervention feasible in terms of time and accessibility as possible. Criterion sampling technique was used to select 20 married teachers from each local government area who were experiencing marital conflict.

The instrument used in collecting data was an Adopted on Marital Conflict Inventory by Udoka, Umoren, Adejumo, and Osinowo (2024) The MCI is an indigenous Nigerian instrument developed to assess marital conflict, particularly as manifested through communication difficulties, third-party interference and sexual dissatisfaction. The inventory contains 25 items organised into four empirically derived factors. The first factor comprises ten (10) items relating mainly to communication, disagreement, financial issues and family-related concerns; the second comprises eight (8) items relating to infidelity, anger, in-law interference and negative interpersonal interactions; the third comprises four (4) items involving third-party influence, suspicion and behavioural issues; while the fourth comprises three (3) items measuring sexual conflict and dissatisfaction. The instrument was developed through qualitative interviews and revalidated quantitatively among 490 participants in Lagos State, Nigeria. (Udoka et al., 2024). Also, Marital Conflict Inventory was administered to participants other than the sample size using a split-half reliability method and the coefficient was .82 was established.

Results

Table 1: *Demographic Analysis of respondents*

Demographic data	Freq.	%
Gender		
Male	29	48.33
Female	31	51.67
Total	60	100
Age		
Younger	23	38.33
Older	37	61.67
Total	60	100

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of 51.67% (31) of the respondents were female, while 48.33% (29) were male. In terms of age a larger proportion of participants (61.67%, $n = 37$) were older, whereas only 38.33% ($n = 23$) were younger. This suggests that the sample was dominated by older teachers, and the findings may therefore reflect perspectives shaped by their ages. The gender imbalance may also indicate either higher female representation in the population or greater willingness of female respondents to participate in the study.

Results

H01: *There is no significant main effect of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) on the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.*

Table 2

Univariate Test Table Showing Main effects of AST and SFT on MC

Dependent Variable: Marital Conflict

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Contrast	25254.590	1	12627.295	83.056	.000
Error	7601.633	50	152.033		

Table 2 indicates the significant value of 0.00 is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($F_{cal}=83.06$; $p < 0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that AST and SFT have a significant main effect on marital conflict among secondary school teachers in Kwara State.

H02: *There is no significant main effect of gender on the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.*

Table 3

Univariate Test Table for the Main effects of Gender on Marital Conflict among Secondary School Teachers in Kwara State

Dependent Variable: Marital Conflict

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Contrast	2216.332	1	2216.332	14.578	.000
Error	7601.633	50	152.033		

The table 3 shows that the calculated p value of 0.00 is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($F_{calculated} = 14.57$; $p < 0.05$). Hence, null hypothesis 2 is rejected. This implies

that gender has a significant main effect on the management of marital conflict among secondary school teachers in Kwara State.

H03: There is no significant main effect of age on the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State

Table 4

Univariate Test Table for the Main effects of Age on Marital Conflict among Secondary School Teachers in Kwara State

Dependent Variable: Marital Conflict

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Contrast	314.499	1	314.499	2.069	0.157
Error	7601.633	50	152.033		

The table 4 shows that p.value of 0.16 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance ($F_{cal}=2.07$; $p>0.05$). Hence, the hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is no significant main effect of age on the marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.

H04: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) and gender on the management of marital conflict among married secondary school teachers in Kwara State.

Table 10

Interaction effects of Treatment and Gender on Marital Conflict of Married Teachers in Kwara State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Contrast	1177.682	1	588.841	3.873	0.03
Error	7601.633	50	152.033		

Table 4 shows p value of 0.03 is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($F_{cal}=3.87$; $p<0.05$). Hence, null hypothesis 4 was rejected. This implies that there is a significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on the management of marital conflict among married school teachers in Kwara State.

H05: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy) and age in the management of marital conflict among married secondary school teachers in Kwara State.

Table 6

Interaction effects of Treatment and Age in Managing Marital Conflict among married Secondary School Teachers in Kwara in Kwara State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Contrast	411.743	1	205.871	1.36	.267
Error	7601.633	50	152.033		

Table 6 presents that calculated p value of 0.27 is greater than the set value of 0.05 level of significance ($F_{cal}=1.36$; $p>0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis five was retained (accepted). This implies that there is no significant interaction effect of treatment and age in managing marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.

H06: There is no significant interaction effect of age and gender on the management of marital conflict among married teachers in Kwara State.

Table 7

Interaction effects of Gender and Age in Managing Marital Conflict among Married Secondary School Teachers in Kwara State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Contrast	901.491	1	901.491	5.930	.002
Error	7601.633	50	152.033		

Table 7 shows that calculated p value of 0.02 was less than the 0.05 level of significance ($F_{cal}=5.93$; $p < 0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis 6 was rejected. This implies that there is a significant interaction effect of age and gender in managing marital conflict among married secondary school teachers in Kwara State.

Table 8

H07: There are no significant interaction effects of treatment (Assertiveness Skill Training and Solution-Focused Therapy), age and gender on the management of marital conflict among married secondary school teachers in Kwara State.

Table 8

Interaction effects of Treatment, Gender and Age in Managing Marital Conflict among Married Secondary School Teachers in Kwara State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Contrast	0.000	1	0.00	0.00	
Error	7601.633	50	152.033		

Table 8 shows the result obtained from testing hypothesis seven. From the table, the type III sum of squares returns 0.00. This makes the three-way interaction effect of treatment, gender and age inestimable. Thus, the collected data could not allow estimation of the F ratio for the three-way interaction of treatment, gender, and age.

Discussion

The finding of the study revealed a statistically significant main effect of treatment on marital conflict among married secondary school teachers in Kwara State. The result showed an F-value of 83.06 with a significance value of $p < .05$. Consequently, the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant main effect of Assertiveness Skills Training (AST) and Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) on marital conflict was rejected. This finding indicates that participation in the therapeutic interventions was associated with significant differences in marital conflict outcomes among the participants. The finding is consistent with Abdullahi and Bala (2024), who reported significant reductions in marital conflict following assertiveness and discipline training among married female students. It is also consistent with Abdullahi and Abubakar (2025), whose intervention produced significant improvements in communication and other stress-related marital difficulties. Similarly, the review by Vermeulen-Oskam et al. (2024), as reported in the present study, found substantial effects of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy on psychosocial outcomes, including marital functioning.

The present finding is also supported by evidence from Kwara State. Abdulkareem and Lasis (2024) demonstrated the application of a structured therapeutic intervention among married teachers in the state, while Adegboyega et al. (2026) reported significant reductions in marital conflict following counselling interventions involving Schema Therapy and Mutual Behaviour

Analysis. However, the present result only establishes that the treatment factor had a significant effect. Since the table does not present the separate post-treatment means for AST and SFT, the result should not be interpreted as evidence that AST was more effective than SFT or vice versa.

The most prominent finding was the significant main effect of treatment. The very large difference between the counselling groups and the control group demonstrates that participation in structured counselling was associated with substantially lower marital-conflict scores. The AST group recorded an estimated mean of 34.30, while the SFT group recorded 28.52, compared with 77.88 for the control group. The pairwise results are particularly important because both AST and SFT differed significantly from the control condition. However, the 5.783-point difference between AST and SFT was not significant ($p = .638$). Thus, the appropriate interpretation is that both interventions were effective, with SFT producing the lowest numerical mean, but the study did not establish a statistically significant difference between the two active interventions.

This finding is consistent with recent evidence concerning assertiveness-oriented interventions. Abdullahi and Bala (2024) reported significant reductions in marital conflict following assertiveness and discipline training among married female students in Sokoto. Abdullahi and Abubakar (2025) similarly reported significant improvements following assertiveness counselling. In contrast Ogungbemi et al. (2024) reported no significant gender differences in factors associated with marital conflict among newly married couples in Ilorin. This difference may be attributable to differences in population, sample characteristics, study variables, instruments and research designs.

The SFT result is also consistent with contemporary synthesis. Vermeulen-Oskam et al. (2024) found a large overall effect for SFBT and particularly large effects for couples and marital functioning. Naseh's (2025) systematic review likewise found medium-to-large effects of SFBT on marital outcomes. The present finding therefore contributes Nigerian evidence to an international literature suggesting that solution-focused approaches can be useful in addressing relationship difficulties.

Gender had a significant main effect. However, this finding should not be interpreted as evidence that gender itself causes marital conflict. Rather, it strengthens the argument for gender-sensitive counselling

The result also provides a useful qualification to studies reporting no gender differences. For example, Ogungbemi et al. (2024) found no significant gender difference in reported factors responsible for marital conflict among newly married couples in Ilorin. The apparent difference may arise because the two studies examined different outcomes: Ogungbemi et al. investigated factors associated with conflict in a descriptive survey, whereas the present study examined intervention outcomes among selected high-conflict teachers.

Age did not have a significant main effect on marital conflict, $F(1, 50) = 2.07$, $p = .157$. This indicates that, within the categories and sample examined, the interventions did not produce statistically different overall outcomes simply because participants belonged to different age groups. This finding is compatible with evidence from Ogungbemi et al. (2024), who found no significant age differences in factors responsible for marital conflicts among newly married couples in Ilorin. Nevertheless, age should not be completely disregarded in counselling practice. Although, it does not imply that age is irrelevant to every aspect of marital functioning. Indeed, the present study found a significant age, gender interaction, suggesting that age may operate differently in combination with gender.

The significant treatment gender interaction is one of the most practically important findings. The pattern indicates that intervention effects differed across gender-treatment

combinations. The findings complement recent counselling research in Kwara State. Abdulkareem and Lasis (2024) demonstrated the application of Imago Relationship Therapy among married teachers in Kwara State, while Adegboyega et al. (2026) found that Schema Therapy and Mutual Behaviour Analysis could significantly reduce marital conflict among couples in the state. Taken together, these studies suggest that marital conflict in Kwara State is increasingly being examined not merely as a social problem but as a counselling intervention target. The present study contributes specifically by evaluating AST and SFT among secondary school teachers.

Conclusion

The study provides empirical evidence that structured counselling interventions can significantly reduce marital conflict among selected married secondary school teachers in Kwara State. Both Assertiveness Skills Training and Solution-Focused Therapy produced significantly lower marital-conflict outcomes than the control condition. Although SFT produced the lowest estimated marginal mean, the difference between SFT and AST was not statistically significant. It is therefore more scientifically accurate to conclude that both interventions were effective, rather than claiming that SFT was statistically superior to AST. Gender significantly influenced marital-conflict outcomes, and treatment interacted significantly with gender. Age did not have a significant main effect, although age interacted significantly with gender. These findings reinforce the importance of individualized and gender-sensitive counselling rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, it was therefore recommended the following;

1. School counselling units, marriage counsellors and relevant educational authorities should incorporate AST and SFT interventions into teacher welfare and counselling services.
2. Counselling programmes should provide opportunities for both male and female teachers to examine communication patterns, role expectations, emotional expression, financial responsibilities, parenting responsibilities and decision-making within marriage.
3. Marriage counsellors should focus on the actual nature of the conflict, communication patterns, family responsibilities, financial concerns, emotional needs and other relevant relationship factors.
4. Counsellors should consider flexible and gender-responsive counselling strategies when implementing AST and SFT among married teachers.
5. Counsellors should instead individualise intervention of AST and SFT across different age groups according to the nature and severity of the presenting marital difficulties
6. Counselling assessments should allow practitioners to identify whether particular relational challenges are associated with participants' stage of life, gender-related expectations and marital responsibilities.
7. Future researcher may replicate study with a larger and more evenly distributed sample would provide stronger evidence regarding whether treatment outcomes vary simultaneously according to age and gender.

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