



KNOWLEDGE AND PREVALENCE OF MARIJUANA USAGE AMONG YOUTHS IN ILISHAN COMMUNITY, OGUN STATE

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ABSTRACT: The use of marijuana is increasing, and new ways of consuming it are emerging, which can have serious and various health effects. Smoking marijuana, which is the most common method of marijuana usage, exposes the lungs to toxic combustion substances, which can cause various respiratory problems such as asthma, pneumonia, emphysema, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases. This knowledge gap can lead to misconceptions that normalize its use, particularly in communities where access to marijuana is relatively easy. Educational efforts are crucial in addressing these gaps, as misinformation can contribute to increased usage, addiction, and associated health problems among youths. The study, therefore, determined the knowledge and prevalence of marijuana usage among youths in the Ilishan community, Ogun State. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was adopted, and a multistage sampling technique was used to select 163 participants. Data collection was conducted using a validated, self-administered questionnaire. Knowledge levels were assessed on an 8-point scale. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 21.0, applying descriptive statistics (frequency tables, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation test) to analyze research questions and hypotheses. Findings revealed that 38.7% of respondents were aged 15–19 years. The majority (73.6%) were male, while 81.6% were single. Nearly half (46.6%) had completed secondary education. About 32.5% were self-employed, and 66.9% cited "other" sources of income. Additionally, 41.1% lived with their parents or guardians. Overall, respondents demonstrated poor knowledge of marijuana use, with a mean score of 3.56 ± 4.53 . Statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between knowledge levels and marijuana use among youths ($R = 0.187$; $p < 0.05$). In conclusion, the study's findings show that many respondents have poor knowledge, underscoring the urgent need for targeted public health interventions. To sum up, the prevalence of marijuana use among youths in Ilishan is exceptionally high. Therefore, public health education programs and regular awareness campaigns supported by governmental and non-governmental organizations through electronic and non-electronic media are essential to give young people, particularly those in the Ilishan community, up-to-date information on the health consequences of substance use.

KEYWORDS: Knowledge, Perception, Prevalence, Marijuana usage, Youths.



INTRODUCTION

Marijuana, also known as cannabis or weed, among other names, is a psychoactive drug derived from the cannabis plant (Malabadi et al., 2023). Hasan (2023) stated that marijuana can be smoked, vaporized, and consumed through edibles in a variety of ways. The use of marijuana is increasing, and new ways of consuming it are emerging, which can have serious and various health effects. Smoking marijuana, which is the most common method of marijuana usage, exposes the lungs to toxic combustion substances, which can cause various respiratory problems such as asthma, pneumonia, emphysema, and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (Vásconez et al., 2023).

A total of 270 million people (about 5.5% of the world's population) are estimated to be using psychoactive substances globally in 2021 (World Health Organization, 2023). Also, no fewer than 35 million people are currently being affected by drug disorders, while 0.5 deaths are attributed to abnormal drug use all over the world, and cannabis is one of the most used illicit drugs globally (Ajibola et al., 2023). Studies show that over 3.3 million people use marijuana yearly (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2023). The use of marijuana has been linked to several detrimental health effects, such as decreased cognitive function, a higher chance of psychotic and affective disorders, drug dependence, school dropout, unemployment, cancer risks, and other health issues. (Tetteh et al., 2021).

In the United States, 45% of individuals reported ever using marijuana, and 18% reported using it at least once annually in 2019 (Farrelly et al., 2023). Marijuana use overall in Canada has significantly increased each year since legalization, from an estimated 15% of all adults over age 15 in 2017 (before legalization) to 25.2% of all adults over 15 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023). A New Zealand birth cohort discovered that by the age of 21, nearly 70% had used marijuana (Farrelly et al., 2023). Parallel to the increased marijuana use, the rate of cannabis-related consequences has also increased across these countries, including marijuana dependence, increased crime rate (e.g., increased possession charges), homicides, murder, and rape are linked with the high rate of marijuana usage, and suicidal ideation and behaviors are also resultant of this substance intake (Flores et al., 2023).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), cannabis use among adolescents remains a significant public health concern. In a 2024 report focusing on adolescent substance use in the European region, WHO found that over 1 in 10 (12%) 15-year-olds reported having ever used cannabis. Additionally, 6% of 15-year-olds reported cannabis use within the past 30 days (WHO/Europe Report, 2021). While specific global data on adolescent cannabis consumption rates and prevalence are limited, regional studies provide valuable insights. For instance, in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that in 2022, 30.7% of 12th graders had used cannabis in the past year, with 6.3% reporting daily use in the past 30 days (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2024). Vaping cannabis is becoming increasingly popular among adolescents, with 14% of 10th graders reporting its use in the past year (Miech et al., 2020).

According to the 2018 Drug Use Survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), it highlights that cannabis is indeed the most-used drug in Nigeria. The survey reports that more than 10% of the adult population, approximately 10.6 million adults, reported using cannabis in the past year. This underscores the widespread use and availability of cannabis in Nigeria (UNODC, 2018). Cannabis is cultivated and produced in Nigeria for



both domestic use and export. From 2017 to 2019, Nigeria recorded the second-highest quantity of cannabis herb seized in Africa, averaging around 260 tons annually (UNODC, 2018). This figure was close to Morocco's, with an annual average of 280 tons (UNODC, 2018). Over half of those admitted to treatment for illegal drug use in 2018 were admitted for cannabis use. The cannabis produced in Nigeria supplies its substantial domestic market, which had an estimated 10.6 million users in 2018 (UNODC, 2018). Additionally, there is evidence of trafficking to other African countries (UNODC, 2018). Over the past decade, several countries outside Africa have also mentioned Nigeria as a source of cannabis (UNODC, 2018). Between 2016 and 2018, an annual average of 1,600 hectares of cannabis were eradicated in Nigeria, almost 20% of the estimated area in the six states (Edo, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo) surveyed. This points towards a significant "dark figure" (i.e., the amount of cannabis that is undetected and unreported) (UNODC, 2018).

In 2023, operatives of the Ogun State command of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) seized 222.42 kilograms of cannabis at various drug joints in the state (Nwafor, 2023). Additionally, the command recovered 3.33 tons of cannabis sativa between January and May. The NDLEA state commander announced at a press conference, held ahead of the 2024 United Nations International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, that 147 suspects (117 males and 30 females) were arrested for cannabis-related offenses over the last five months (Oba, 2024). There were 71 charged cases, 174 pending cases, and 86 secured convictions (Oba, 2024).

In Nigeria, the knowledge of marijuana usage among youths is a complex issue influenced by various socioeconomic and cultural factors (Jatau et al., 2021). While many young people are aware of marijuana, their understanding of its effects, legality, and health risks is often fragmented or incomplete (Jacobs et al., 2021). This knowledge gap can lead to misconceptions that normalize its use, particularly in communities where access to marijuana is relatively easy (Ojieabu et al., 2020). Educational efforts are crucial in addressing these gaps, as misinformation can contribute to increased usage, addiction, and associated health problems among youths (Jacobs et al., 2021).

METHODS

Study Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional design using a multi-stage sampling technique to select respondents to partake in the study. A validated questionnaire was self-administered for data collection on respondents' levels of knowledge about marijuana and the extent of its prevalence among youths within the community.

Description of Study Area and Population

Ilisan is located in the Ikenne Local Government Area of Ogun State. Ogun State, located in southwestern Nigeria, is an ideal study area due to its socioeconomic diversity, cultural richness, and strategic geographical positioning. Ilisan's 2024 population is now estimated at 415,776. The community is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group, whose rich cultural practices are reflected in local festivals, traditional art, and cuisine. The people of



Ilshan engage in various economic activities, including farming, trading, and service-oriented businesses.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected using a close-ended questionnaire. The instrument was pretested with 10% of the sample size from a population with similar characteristics but not the actual population. The test-retest technique was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Errors and omissions were corrected based on the pretest before the final questionnaire for the study was produced. Cronbach's Alpha test for internal consistency was 0.81. Ethical approval was obtained from the Babcock University Health Research Ethical Committee before the commencement of the research. The instrument was distributed using trained research assistants, and to ensure the anonymity of respondents, personal identifiers were not requested. Data from this research was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 as a coding guide. Pearson correlation was done to determine the relationship between the variables and test the independent variable's influence on the dependent variable. The level of significance is set at 5%.

RESULTS

From the result of the study, 38.7% of the respondents were between the ages of 15 and 19 years, 73.6% were male, 81.6% of the respondents were single, 46.6% of the respondents had secondary education, 32.5% were self-employed, 66.9% of the respondents mentioned others as their source of income and 41.1% of the respondents live with their parents/guardians (See Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables and Items to be considered	Respondents in this Study N=163	
	N	%
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA		
Age (in years)		
15-19	63	38.7
20-24	44	27.0
25-29	56	34.4
Gender		
Male	120	73.6
Female	43	26.4
Marital Status		
Single	133	81.6
Married	30	18.4

**Highest level of Education completed**

No formal education	30	18.4
Primary	33	20.2
Secondary	76	46.6
Tertiary qualification	24	14.7

Occupation

Student	45	27.6
Unemployed	44	27.0
Employed	21	12.9
Self-Employed	53	32.5

Income

Cement	30	18.4
Wood	-	-
Soil bricks	24	14.7
Others	109	66.9

Living Status

Alone	55	33.7
With Parents/Guardian	67	41.1
With Siblings	41	25.2

* Frequency (N), Percentage (%)

Respondents' Knowledge about Marijuana Use among Youths

This study revealed that 42.3% of the respondents reported that nicotine (the chemical found in cigarettes) is found in marijuana and 42.9% stated that marijuana affects mood, thinking and how people see things. Fewer respondents (31.3%) reported that the common short-term effect of using it was slowed thinking, poor coordination, and a faster heartbeat. 32.5% of the respondents knew that they may develop health problems like anxiety, schizophrenia, lung diseases and other detrimental health problems if marijuana is used for a long time. (48.5%) of the respondents knew that using marijuana at a young age is risky because it can slow brain development and affect thinking skills. 37.4% of the respondents reported that marijuana affects driving by slowing reaction time and makes driving more dangerous. And only 35.0% of the respondents knew that the illegal status of marijuana use in Nigeria is that it is Illegal. 14.7% of the respondents mentioned that the misconception (common false belief) about marijuana is that it has no bad effects and it's completely safe. (See table 2).

The level of knowledge about marijuana use among youths measured on an 8-point rating scale showed that the respondents scored a mean of 3.56 ± 4.53 , translated to a level of knowledge prevalence of 44.46% (See table 4.5). The category of the respondents with a poor level of knowledge was 53.9% (See table 3). While 9.20 had average knowledge (See table 3). One can conclude that below half (36.9%) of the respondents had good knowledge about marijuana use among youths.



Table 2: Respondents' Level of Knowledge about Marijuana Use among Youths

Variables and Items to be considered	Respondents in this Study	
	N=163	
	N	%
Which of these harmful substances are found in marijuana?		
CBD and THC (a chemical that helps with pain and relaxation and 'high' feeling)	40	24.5
Nicotine (the chemical found in cigarettes)	69	42.3
Morphine (a strong painkiller)	12	7.4
It contains no harmful substances	42	25.8
How does marijuana affect the brain?		
It makes people smarter and improves memory	15	9.2
It changes mood, thinking, and how people see things	70	42.9
It doesn't affect the brain at all	49	30.1
It makes the brain work faster and better	29	17.8
Which of these is a common short-term effect of using marijuana?		
Better focus and problem-solving skills	25	15.3
Slower thinking, poor coordination, and a faster heartbeat	51	31.3
Stronger muscles and more energy	2	1.2
No effect at all	85	52.1
What can happen if someone uses marijuana for a long time?		
They become smarter and make better decisions	15	9.2
They may develop health problems like anxiety, schizophrenia, lungs diseases and other detrimental health	53	32.5
Their immune system gets stronger, and they rarely get sick	22	13.5
Nothing, it has no long-term effects	73	44.8



Why is using marijuana at a young age risky?

It helps the brain grow and work better	13	8.0
It can slow brain development and affect thinking skills	79	48.5
It improves school performance and working rate	51	31.3
It makes bones and muscles stronger	20	12.3

How does marijuana affect driving?

It doesn't affect driving at all	36	22.1
It slows reaction time and makes driving more dangerous	61	37.4
It makes drivers more alert and improves focus	21	12.9
Only new drivers are affected, not experienced ones	45	27.6

What is the legal status of marijuana in Nigeria?

It is legal for both medical and personal use	5	3.1
It is illegal in Nigeria	57	35.0
It is allowed for medical reasons	33	20.2
It is only legal during festive periods	68	41.7

Which of these is a misconception (common false belief) about marijuana

It has no bad effects and is completely safe	24	14.7
Some doctors use it to treat medical conditions	51	31.3
It can have both short-term and long-term health effects	43	26.4
Using it too much can take it hard to stop and cause withdrawal symptoms	45	27.6

* Frequency (N), Percentage (%)

**Table 3: Category of Respondent's Level of Knowledge about Marijuana Use among Youths**

Respondents in this Study N=163		
	N	%
Poor Knowledge (0 - 2)	88	53.9
Average Knowledge (3 -5)	15	9.20
Good Knowledge (6 - 8)	60	36.9

* Frequency (N), Percentage (%)

Prevalence of Marijuana Use among Youths

Virtually all (96.3%) of the respondents have used marijuana and 77.3% of the respondents mentioned that they do use marijuana daily. 43.6% of the respondents reported that they started trying to use marijuana between the ages of 16 and 18 years old. The findings from the study showed that 52.8% of the respondents mentioned that it is very common (Almost everyone they know uses marijuana), i.e., among youths in the Ilishan Community. And 35.6% of the respondents mentioned that the main reason they use or have tried marijuana is because it helps them relax and relieve stress (See table 4).

Table 4: Prevalence of Marijuana Use among Youths

Variables and Items to be considered	Respondents in this Study N=163	
	N	%
Have you ever used marijuana?		
Yes	157	96.3
No	6	3.7
How often do you use marijuana?		
I have never used it	18	11.0
I have used it once or twice in my lifetime	-	-
I use it occasionally (once in a while)	6	3.7
I use it regularly (weekly or more)	13	8.0
I use it daily	126	77.3
At what age did you first try marijuana		
I have never used marijuana	1	0.6
Below 12 years old	-	-
13 – 15 years old	25	15.3
16 – 18 years old	71	43.6
19 – 21 years old	64	39.3
22 years or older	2	1.2



How common do you think marijuana use is among youths

in the Ilishan community?

Very rare (Hardly anyone uses it)	-	-
Rare (A few people use it)	1	0.6
Moderately common (Some youths use it, but not most)	1	0.6
Common (Many youths use it)	75	46.0
Very common (Almost everyone I know uses it)	86	52.8

What is the main reason you use or have tried marijuana?

Curiosity (I wanted to try it and see how it feels).	2	1.2
Peer pressure (My friends or people around me use it).	24	14.7
To relax or relieve stress	58	35.6
To improve focus or creativity	29	17.8
It helps me cope with hardship such as poverty and unemployment.	34	20.9
It helps in improving appetite, reducing pain and improving sleep quality.	11	6.7
To escape from problems or emotions	3	1.8
For fun or social enjoyment	2	1.2
Others (please specify)	-	-

* Frequency (N), Percentage (%)

Test of Hypotheses

In testing these hypotheses, Correlation test was conducted at a 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule applied was that if the p-value computed was less than or equal to the cut-off p-value of 0.05, the null hypothesis would be rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis and vice versa.

There is no significant relationship between level of knowledge and marijuana use among youths. The result of the Pearson correlation showed that there is a significant relationship between level of knowledge and marijuana use (Knowledge ($R = 0.187$; $p = 0.01$)) (See table 4.6). Therefore, based on the value, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Respondents' Level of Knowledge about Marijuana Use among Youths

The findings of this study reveal significant gaps in the knowledge of marijuana use among youths. Of the 163 respondents, 57.1% exhibited poor knowledge, indicating widespread misconceptions and limited awareness regarding the effects, risks, and legal status of marijuana. These findings align with several contemporary studies that have examined youth

perceptions of cannabis, particularly in regions where its legal status and cultural attitudes are evolving.

The study indicates that only 24.5% of respondents correctly identified THC and CBD as the primary components of marijuana. Interestingly, 42.3% incorrectly believed that nicotine, found in cigarettes, is present in marijuana, while 7.4% assumed it contained morphine. This misconception reflects a broader trend observed in recent studies, such as one by Leos-Toro et al. (2021), which found that many adolescents and young adults conflate marijuana with tobacco in terms of composition and health risks. In contrast, studies in regions with widespread cannabis education, such as Canada and the U.S., report higher awareness of THC and CBD content among youths (Fischer et al., 2020). A critical finding from this study is that 42.9% of respondents acknowledged that marijuana alters mood, thinking, and perception, but a substantial 30.1% believed it has no effect on the brain. This is concerning, given the extensive evidence linking early marijuana use to cognitive impairments, including reduced memory function and altered brain development (Volkow et al., 2021). A recent longitudinal study by Meier et al. (2022) highlighted that persistent marijuana use in adolescence is associated with lower IQ scores and delayed cognitive development, contradicting the 9.2% of respondents in this study who believed marijuana makes individuals "smarter."

While 31.3% of respondents correctly identified slowed thinking, poor coordination, and increased heart rate as short-term effects, an alarming 52.1% believed marijuana has no immediate impact. This misconception has been echoed in studies among Nigerian youth populations, where a general underestimation of marijuana's immediate cognitive and motor impairments has been reported (Odukoya et al., 2021). In contrast, data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (2023) indicated that even a single use of marijuana can impair motor coordination and reaction time, increasing the risk of accidents and injuries. Regarding long-term consequences, 32.5% of respondents correctly associated marijuana use with anxiety, schizophrenia, and lung diseases. However, 13.5% erroneously believed it strengthens the immune system. In a study by Hindocha et al. (2022), young cannabis users frequently underestimated the risk of cannabis-induced psychosis, which aligns with the partial knowledge observed in this study's respondents. The majority (48.5%) correctly identified that using marijuana at a young age can slow brain development and impair thinking skills. This aligns with neuroscientific findings from Orr et al. (2023), which suggest that cannabis use before age 25 interferes with myelination, a critical process in brain maturation. However, 31.3% of respondents wrongly believed that marijuana improves school performance, a misconception that may contribute to higher rates of usage among youths.

A noteworthy 37.4% correctly indicated that marijuana slows reaction time and makes driving more dangerous, though 22.1% falsely believed it has no effect. These statistics are similar to those reported in a 2022 study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, which found that 23% of young drivers perceived cannabis as having no impact on their driving ability, despite research showing significant impairment in judgment and coordination. A critical aspect of this study is the respondents' knowledge of the legal status of marijuana. While 35% correctly identified it as illegal in Nigeria, a concerning 41.7% believed it is only legal during festive periods. This misunderstanding highlights the need for greater public education on drug policies, as misinformation about legality can influence usage patterns (Eze et al., 2023). Respondents demonstrated varied levels of awareness regarding common myths. While 31.3% correctly recognized that some doctors use marijuana medicinally, 14.7% still believed it is



"completely safe." This mirrors findings from a 2021 survey by the WHO, which noted that despite growing evidence of cannabis-related health risks, public misconceptions persist in countries with unclear regulatory frameworks. Comparative studies from 2020 to 2025 consistently indicate that regions with structured cannabis education programs report higher awareness and lower rates of misuse. Given the similarities in misconceptions between Nigerian youths and other populations with limited formal cannabis education, adopting best practices from countries with effective public health messaging could significantly improve awareness and reduce the potential harms associated with marijuana use.

Prevalence of Marijuana Use among Youths

The prevalence of marijuana use among youths in the study conducted in the Ilishan community is alarmingly high, with 96.3% of respondents indicating that they have used marijuana at some point in their lives. This rate is significantly elevated compared to national and global prevalence rates reported in recent literature. A comparative analysis with studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 highlights the increasing normalization of marijuana use among young people, particularly in regions where socio-economic factors, cultural acceptance, and regulatory frameworks influence accessibility and consumption patterns. Recent studies have shown variability in marijuana use among youths across different regions. For instance, a national survey conducted in the United States in 2023 indicated that approximately 30% of high school seniors had used marijuana in the past year, with about 6% reporting daily use. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) (2022) further reported that marijuana use among young adults aged 18–25 had reached 38%, reflecting a steady increase from previous years. Similarly, European studies have documented a rising trend, with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) reporting that around 15–20% of young people in several European countries have used cannabis in the past year, though daily use remains relatively lower than what was observed in the Ilishan community.

The frequency of marijuana use in Ilishan appears to be notably high, with 77.3% of respondents reporting daily use. This starkly contrasts findings from studies in North America and Europe, where regular use among youth populations is typically reported between 5% and 15%. Such disparity suggests that local environmental and socio-economic factors may be significantly driving usage patterns. One possible explanation is the influence of peer networks, given that over 14% of respondents cited peer pressure as a primary reason for use. Moreover, stress and coping mechanisms play a substantial role, with over 35% using marijuana to relax or relieve stress and another 20.9% indicating that it helps them cope with hardship, including poverty and unemployment. This aligns with findings from studies in lower-income communities, where economic distress often correlates with higher substance use. Age of initiation is another critical factor in understanding marijuana use trends. In this study, a significant proportion of respondents reported first trying marijuana between the ages of 13 and 18, with 43.6% initiating use between 16 and 18 years and 39.3% between 19 and 21 years. These findings are consistent with global trends, as studies have shown that the average age of first marijuana use typically falls between 13 and 17 years. A study conducted in Canada in 2021 found that the mean age of initiation was approximately 15.5 years, with earlier initiation associated with an increased likelihood of developing substance use disorders later in life. Similarly, research from sub-Saharan Africa has shown that early exposure to marijuana is



often linked to higher rates of school dropout, mental health disorders, and increased engagement in risky behaviors.

Perceptions of marijuana use within the Ilishan community further reinforce its widespread prevalence. Over 98% of respondents considered marijuana use to be either common or very common among youths, with 52.8% indicating that "almost everyone they know" uses it. This contrasts sharply with findings from countries with stricter regulations or stronger anti-drug campaigns. For example, a 2022 study in Japan, where marijuana remains highly stigmatized and illegal, found that only 2.3% of young people had ever used cannabis, and social acceptability remained extremely low (Yamamoto & Sato, 2022). Conversely, in jurisdictions where marijuana has been legalized or decriminalized, such as Canada and certain U.S. states, youth perceptions of marijuana as a "normalized" substance have increased, contributing to higher lifetime use rates. The reasons for marijuana use among youths in Ilishan align with broader global patterns, though with some notable distinctions. While stress relief and peer influence are common drivers, worldwide, the role of socio-economic hardships appears to be more pronounced in this setting. The finding that 20.9% of respondents use marijuana as a coping mechanism for poverty and unemployment highlights a public health concern that extends beyond drug policy into broader socio-economic interventions. In contrast, studies in wealthier nations have reported higher rates of marijuana use for recreational and social enjoyment, rather than as a necessity for coping with hardships.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show the high percentage of respondents with poor knowledge, which underscores the urgent need for targeted public health interventions. Misinformation about marijuana's effects can contribute to increased usage and associated risks, particularly among youth. The prevalence of marijuana use among youths in Ilishan is exceptionally high; both in terms of lifetime and daily use, surpassing most reported statistics from other global studies conducted between 2020 and 2025. The study highlights an urgent need for targeted public health interventions to address early initiation, frequent use, and underlying socio-economic drivers.

Competing Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.



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