

The Difficulties Encountered by the Philippine National Police in Handling the Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) Cases in the Province of Nueva Vizcaya

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the challenges faced by the Philippine National Police (PNP) in handling Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases in Nueva Vizcaya. Specifically, it sought to identify the most common types of violence committed, the difficulties encountered by PNP personnel, and whether these difficulties vary based on their profile variables such as age, years of service, municipality, and VAWC cases handled. The researchers developed and adopted a checklist-type questionnaire to determine demographic profiles, such as age, years of service, municipality, and the challenges they face in handling VAWC cases. The study gathered data through surveys administered to 56 PNP personnel across 14 municipalities, selected through purposive sampling method, highlighting variances in challenges based on officers' years of service, age, and the number of cases handled. The results show that the main reasons for their difficulties were victims who hesitated to file a case due to sudden changes of mind, uncooperative witnesses, and victims who were afraid to disclose the truth. The study also revealed that there are no significant differences in the challenges faced by PNP when grouped by age, years of service, cases handled, and municipality. There is still a need to broaden the awareness not only of the victims but also of others to prevent such cases. The researchers recommend the distribution of flyers to enhance the knowledge of victims about their rights and available legal and psychological support. Future studies may explore ways to enhance PNP effectiveness in handling VAWC cases.

Keywords: awareness, community education, legal Support, PNP effectiveness, victim hesitation

INTRODUCTION

Women and children are essential contributors to society, serving as the foundation of families and playing a vital role in the advancement and progress of communities. However, women and children have historically faced inequality, discrimination, and marginalization (United Nations, 2021). Violence against women and children or VAWC encompasses every type of violence, mistreatment, and prejudice directed at women and children based on their gender or age, such as sexual, physical, economic, and psychological abuse. Examples of VAWC include domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, child abuse, child marriage, trafficking, and other types of abuse specifically targeting women and children. VAWC is a grave violation of human rights, inflicting significant physical, psychological, and emotional harm on its victims. Hence, it is crucial to raise awareness about this issue, advocate for prevention measures, and provide support to survivors of VAWC (Philippine Commission on Women, 2019).

Despite a generally progressive trend toward diminishing cultural, racial, and sexual boundaries in many aspects of society, gender inequality remains persistent and continues to exist in the 21st century. Women, regardless of their geographical or cultural background, often endure lifelong struggles against discrimination, abuse, and violence, with poor women bearing the brunt the most (Oxfam International, 2021). Intimate partners and sexual violence in particular are a serious public health issue, an interference with women's fundamental rights, and a significant health concern. In their lifetime, one (1) in three (3) women worldwide will be victims of bodily or sexual assault, most often caused by a close spouse. This serves as a sobering reminder of the extent of discrimination against women and gender inequality (World Health Organization, 2022)

To protect women, international laws and policies against VAWC were passed which include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

(CEDAW), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1992, the Domestic Violence Act of 1998, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), and the Children and Families Act 2014. Additionally, the concept of gender equality outlined in the 1987 Philippine Constitution led to the establishment of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), which advocates for women's empowerment, gender equity, and equality. Another political Filipina group demanding equality, social justice, democracy, and freedom is GABRIELA, which has been instrumental in passing pro-women legislation, including the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act.

The implementation of Republic Act No. 9262, also known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, represents a significant step by the government in combating violence against women and children (VAWC) (UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, 2020). Moreover, in pursuit of this goal, the government has partnered with United Nations agencies and various non-governmental organizations to prevent gender-based violence and provide support to its victims (United Nations, 2020). Under this law, VAWC is defined as any act or series of acts committed by an individual against a woman with whom he has or had an intimate or sexual relationship, or with whom he shares a child, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm, or economic abuse.

Several government agencies and programs, such as the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), review, evaluate, and recommend efforts to facilitate the active inclusion of women in all aspects of economic, social, and cultural growth at national, regional, and international levels. To ensure further equality between men along with women, the Philippine National Police has a unit called Women and Children Protection Center (WCPC) based on the "Juvenile Justice Welfare Act of 2006" and NAPOLCOM Resolution 2012-059 for the Women and Children Protection Center (WCPC) as a Regular Office of the Philippine National Police (PNP), as well as the Gender and Development (GAD) Program, established to perform functions for this purpose.

Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) is the main agency that handles VAWC cases upon receiving complaints from the victims or anyone who knows about the abuse. After that, a WCPD officer conducts an investigation, including taking the victim-survivor's statement and gathering evidence. The victim is then referred to a PNP Crime Laboratory or medical facility for a medico-legal exam, preferably by a same-gender physician in sexual violence cases. After the investigation, the officer refers the victim to social workers, shelters, or NGOs for psychosocial support. All reports, evidence, and statements are submitted to the prosecutor for legal action. The WCPD officer also monitors filed cases and maintains periodic assessment reports (Pavia Police Station, 2024).

However, regardless of the continued efforts from both the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) remains widespread. According to the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), one in four women aged 15 to 49 reported experiencing physical or sexual violence in the year before the survey (Philippine Commission on Women, 2019). Data from the PNP in 2018 revealed that physical abuse accounted for 38.54 percent of the 108,675 cases of domestic violence, making it the most common form (Philippine Statistics Authority, n.d.). Handling VAWC cases also presents significant challenges for police officers, including emotional stress, societal biases, and limited resources. As such, officers must remain professional and resilient while dealing with victims' trauma and complex emotional barriers like fear and dependency. And as Torres et al. (2024) put it, successfully addressing these issues is essential to provide a supportive environment that helps victims seek justice and overcome their fears.

Bayombong, as the capital of Nueva Vizcaya and the most populous area, reports the highest cases of VAWC, followed by Solano. However, many cases do not prosper due to factors such as family intervention, reconciliation, child-related concerns, and financial limitations. Ultimately, the strong emphasis on family and reliance on mediation often leads to repeated

victimization and the withdrawal of cases. Pas-iwen (2025) also stated that one key indicator why the cases do not prosper is that some complainants are indecisive. Victims often no longer wish to continue filing because they do not want to be inconvenienced and thus prefer amicable settlement .

On a broader scale, the province of Nueva Vizcaya has the highest rate of VAWC in the region, according to information presented by Assistant Regional Director Dr. Herita O. Macarubbo during the first quarter meeting of provincial and municipal population officers at Pasalubong Center (Commission on Population, March 2017). Her report stated that Nueva Vizcaya has documented 422 cases of violence against women and 256 cases of violence against children, a total of 678 cases of VAWC, followed by the province of Cagayan with 509 cases, then Isabela with 446, Quirino with 75, and Batanes with 8 cases.

In this context, the study aims to determine the difficulties PNPs encounter in handling VAWC cases in the province of Nueva Vizcaya. Conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2024-2025, it specifically determined the demographic profile of respondents, which includes year of service in the current municipality, age, municipality and VAWC cases handled. Furthermore, it tested if a statistically significant difference in the difficulties encountered by the PNP in handling VAWC cases according to profile variables exists . Finally, an infographic material was crafted based on the findings to address some of the difficulties faced by the Philippine National Police in handling VAWC cases. This can raise public awareness about VAWC and the available resources for victims.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study utilized a descriptive-comparative research design. The descriptive design was used to determine the difficulties encountered by the PNP in handling the cases of VAWC, specifically through the use of survey questionnaires. On the other hand, the comparative design was used to determine the differences between the variables.

This research was conducted in 14 of the 15 municipalities of the province of Nueva Vizcaya, specifically Ambaguio, Aritao, Bagabag, Bayombong, Diadi, Dupax del Norte, Dupax del Sur, Kasibu, Kayapa, Quezon, Santa Fe, Solano, and Villaverde. Alfonso Castaneda was not included because of the challenge in accessibility. A total of 56 respondents were selected to be part of the study, with four respondents from each of the 14 municipalities of Nueva Vizcaya. The selection was purposive, focusing especially on assigned personnel from the Philippine National Police (PNP) who mainly handle VAWC cases. These participants were chosen for their direct involvement in the implementation, monitoring, and response to VAWC-related incidents. For the inclusion criteria of the respondents, the researchers included the PNP personnel from the specialized unit known as the Women and Children's Protection Center (WCPC), which is tasked with investigating and managing cases related to VAWC, and respondents were in any class, at least 25 years of age and above. Personnel from Alfonso Castañeda were excluded due to its location.

The study used an adopted questionnaire from a research study entitled "Problems Encountered by PNP Women and Children's Desk Officers in Handling Cases of Violence Against Women" (Cultura et al., 2017). The questionnaire responses were interpreted using a Likert-type scale with the following assigned values: 1.00 - 1.79 = Never, 1.50 - 2.49 = Sometimes, 2.50 - 3.49 = Often, and 3.50 - 4.00 = Always. Part I of the questionnaire gathered demographic data, including years of service, age, and municipality. Part II examined the types and frequency of VAWC cases handled by the PNP. Part III assessed the challenges faced by the PNP in managing these cases. By analyzing the average scores and response frequencies, the data revealed insights into the extent and nature of VAWC cases and the difficulties encountered by law enforcement.

The researchers utilized frequency counts and percentages to describe the respondents' profiles. To assess the challenges faced by the PNP in managing VAWC cases, responses to the questionnaire were rated using a 4-point Likert scale: never, sometimes, often, and always. ANOVA was used to compare responses when grouped by years of service, age, municipality, and number of VAWC cases handled.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section 1. Profile of the Respondents

Regarding their years of service in the current municipality, a large portion of the individuals have more than 5 years of service. The majority have worked for 11 to 25 years, which could indicate a seasoned workforce, potentially with deeper institutional knowledge and more expertise. With a smaller proportion having worked only 1 to 5 years, it could point to either a higher turnover rate for newer personnel who are still gaining experience.

As to age, the majority are in the 31-40 age range, which suggests a relatively middle-aged workforce, likely balancing both youthful energy and experience. They may be at the peak of their career. The group for 21-30-year-olds makes up just over a quarter, which could be an indicator of younger professionals entering the workforce, though they are still a minority compared to the 31-40 group. The 41-50-year-olds are a much smaller group, possibly indicating fewer people nearing the end of their careers in their municipality.

As to the municipality of PNP personnel, Bayombong has the largest number (12.5%), which could indicate either a higher workload, a larger population, or more complex cases in this municipality. Kasibu has the fewest (3.6%), which might suggest a smaller population, fewer cases, or a more centralized management structure. Amicable settlement is also practiced in this municipality, causing the cases not to prosper. The distribution of PNP personnel across municipalities seems fairly even, but some municipalities like Solano and Bayombong stand out with relatively larger numbers.

Table 1
VAWC Case Handled

VAWC Cases Handled	Frequency
Sexual Violence	188
Psychological Violence	325
Economic Violence	108
Physical Violence	102

Table 1 displays that psychological violence is by far the most frequent type of case, making up 44.9% of all cases. This suggests that issues such as emotional abuse, mental manipulation, and coercion are very prevalent, which might often go underreported compared to physical violence. Sexual violence is the second most frequent category, with 26% of total cases, showing the serious nature of these cases in the municipality. Physical violence and economic violence make up smaller portions, but their presence highlights the complex range of issues handled by the municipality's workforce.

Section 2. Difficulties of PNP in Addressing the Problem of VAWC Cases

Table 2

Perceived Difficulties of PNP in Addressing the Problem of VAWC Cases

Indicators	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
1. Victims failed to reveal the true facts.	2.05	.44	Sometimes
2. Fear of reprisals from supposed respondent	2.14	.58	Sometimes
3. Lack of victim's resolve to bring the respondent to justice	2.23	.73	Sometimes
4. Uncooperative witnesses	2.23	.57	Sometimes
5. Apprehension of the victim about the total absence of support in ease suspect is detained	2.19	.79	Sometimes
6. Desk Officer lack of knowledge about the provision of R.A 9262	1.05	.79	Never
7. Lack of police protection to complainants	1.14	.48	Never
8. Legal constraints in the arrest of respondents	1.69	1.0	Never
9. Lack of initiative of Desk Officer to provide assistance to complainants	1.01	.13	Never
10. No source of funds to support the needs of the complainant's family during the period of investigation or trial	1.44	.63	Never
Mean Rating	1.72	.22	

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49: Never; 1.50 – 2.49: Sometimes; 2.50 – 3.49: Often; 3.50 – 4.00: Always

As Table 2 presents, the difficulties with the highest mean scores (between 2.05 and 2.23) are:

1. Victims failed to reveal the true facts (Mean = 2.05). This difficulty is perceived as a moderate issue. Victims sometimes do not fully disclose the details of the violence, likely due to fear, shame, or trauma. This can impede the police investigation.
2. Fear of reprisals from the supposed respondent (Mean = 2.14). Victims sometimes fear retaliation from the accused, which could discourage them from reporting or pursuing legal action. This suggests the presence of safety concerns, both during the investigation and in the long term.
3. Lack of victim's resolve to bring the respondent to justice (Mean = 2.23). Victims may sometimes lack the resolve or the emotional strength to continue the legal process. This could be due to societal pressures, economic dependence, or lack of support systems.
4. Uncooperative witnesses (Mean = 2.23). Witnesses may sometimes be unwilling to cooperate with the police, either due to fear, social pressures, or a lack of understanding of the importance of their testimony in such cases.
5. Apprehension of the victim about the total absence of support if the suspect is detained (Mean = 2.19). Victims may sometimes fear that, even if the perpetrator is detained, there may be no further support or protection provided to them, leaving them vulnerable. This highlights gaps in victim support systems post-arrest.

The indicators with the lowest mean scores (below 1.49, rated as "Never") are:

1. Desk Officer's lack of knowledge about the provision of R.A. 9262 (Mean = 1.05). This issue is considered very rare. The low score suggests that desk officers typically possess knowledge of RA 9262, which is critical in handling VAWC cases.
2. Lack of police protection to complainants (Mean = 1.14). The PNP seems to rarely lack protection for complainants, indicating that police protection is generally available when needed.
3. Legal constraints in the arrest of respondents (Mean = 1.69). This is still rated as "Never," but it is somewhat more frequent than the issues above. Legal constraints are sometimes an issue, but not regularly perceived as a significant barrier to addressing VAWC cases.

4. Lack of initiative of the Desk Officer to provide assistance to complainants (Mean = 1.01). This is rarely a concern. Desk officers are usually proactive in assisting victims, ensuring they receive the necessary support.
5. No source of funds to support the needs of the complainant's family during investigation or trial (Mean = 1.44). This issue is rare but sometimes present. The lack of financial support during legal proceedings can be a problem, particularly for victims who might be economically dependent on the perpetrator.

The mean values imply that the respondents sometimes encounter difficulties because the victims fail to reveal the facts, they fear reprisal from the abuser, and they lack the resolve to bring the abuser to justice. They also encounter uncooperative witnesses, and total absence of support in case the suspect is detained. This implies that the victims may not fully understand their right or recognize the abuse they have experienced as a crime. Another factor is emotional dependency. Victims in abusive relationships might feel emotionally or financially dependent on the perpetrator, making them unwilling to pursue legal actions.

The data further suggest that the PNP personnel encounter difficulties because of the victims' lack of awareness regarding the provision of R.A 9262, lack of police protection to complaints, legal constraints in the arrest of respondents, and lack of initiative of the desk officer to assist complainants. Additionally, there is no financial support available to meet the complainant's family's needs during the investigation or trial period.

A similar study conducted by Cultura et al. (2017) revealed that one of the primary challenges faced by WCPD officers when handling complaints is the lack of cooperation from the caller or the abused woman. Officers noted that many victims hesitate to disclose full details of their experiences, primarily because they are still in shock following the violence they endured. Additionally, many perceive the incident as a deeply humiliating experience, making it difficult for them to discuss such private matters (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010). Another significant concern is the lack of financial resources to support the complainant's family during the investigation or trial, which ranked second with a weighted mean of 2.97 and was frequently reported. Fear of retaliation from the accused and concerns about the victim's arrest, as well as the lack of support if the suspect is detained, shared the same rank of 3.5 with a weighted mean of 2.87 and were also frequently reported. Following closely, with a rank of 5.5, were victims' fears about the complete absence of support if the suspect is detained and legal constraints in arresting the accused, both with a weighted mean of 3.27, described as frequent.

With regards to their capability, PNP personnel receive specific training on handling cases involving women and children, which equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively. Additionally, PNP personnel have institutionalized mechanisms to ensure cases involving women and children are prioritized and handled with sensitivity, providing personnel with clear guidelines.

Section 3. Comparison of the Difficulties Encountered by the PNP in Handling VAWC Cases When Grouped by Profile Variables

Table 3

Comparison of the Difficulties Encountered by the PNP in Handling VAWC Cases When Grouped by Years of Service

Years of Service	N	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description	F	df	P-value
1 – 5	10	1.70	.24	Sometimes	1.140	2	.328
6 – 10	22	1.77	.17	Sometimes			
11 - 25	24	1.67	.25	Sometimes			

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49: Never; 1.50 – 2.49: Sometimes; 2.50 – 3.49: Often; 3.50 – 4.00: Always

Table 3 shows that the mean scores for all groups are very close to each other, ranging from 1.67 to 1.77, and all are categorized as "sometimes." This suggests that the difficulties faced by the PNP in handling VAWC cases are perceived similarly across all groups of respondents, regardless of their years of service. It shows that whether new or having spent a significant time in service, the PNP personnel of WCPD still face the same difficulties as the officer personnel. In fact, the p-value of 0.328 is greater than 0.05, which indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the difficulties encountered by PNP personnel based on their years of service.

In their study, Torres et al. (2024) explored the emotional and professional challenges faced by female police officers handling VAWC cases. Through in-depth interviews with five officers from the WCPD, the study revealed several key themes: emotional difficulties in handling such cases, the importance of empathy and trust-building with victims, the significant role female officers play in providing support, and the coping strategies they use to deal with stress. While empathy is essential for effective victim support, it also heightens emotional strain, especially in cases involving male offenders. The study highlights the crucial role of trauma-informed and gender-sensitive training in building trust with victims. Nonetheless, issues like victims' loyalty dilemmas and fear of retaliation underline the importance of emotional resilience among officers.

Table 4

Comparison of the Difficulties Encountered by the PNP in Handling VAWC Cases When Grouped by Age

Age Group in Years	N	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description	F	df	p-value
21-30	15	1.78	.25	Sometimes	2.131	55	.129
31-40	34	1.70	.24	Sometimes			
41-50	7	1.55	.12	Sometimes			

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49: Never; 1.50 – 2.49: Sometimes; 2.50 – 3.49: Often; 3.50 – 4.00: Always

The p-value of 0.129 exceeds 0.05, which suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in the perceived difficulties faced by PNP personnel according to their age. The F-value of 2.131 suggests some degree of variability between the groups, but the results are not statistically significant, implying that age does not play a significant role in how PNP personnel experience or perceive these challenges. This implies that respondents sometimes face difficulties regardless of their age.

Dealing with such sensitive issues requires a high level of understanding and sensitivity, as handling cases involving children and women requires specific training, skills, and sensitivity. If the personnel lack the required skills or resources to handle such cases, they may encounter difficulties in handling them, regardless of their age or years of service.

Table 5

Comparison of the Difficulties Encountered by the PNP in Handling VAWC Cases When Grouped by Municipality

Municipality	N	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description	F	df	P-value
Ambaguio	4	1.70	.00	Sometimes	2.610	13	.059
Aritao	4	1.85	.12	Sometimes			
Bagabag	3	1.60	.17	Sometimes			
Bambang	4	1.87	.17	Sometimes			
Bayombong	8	1.53	.19	Sometimes			
Diadi	4	1.82	.20	Sometimes			
Dupax del Norte	4	1.57	.09	Sometimes			
Dupax Del Sur	4	1.70	.21	Sometimes			

Kasibu	2	2.15	.35	Sometimes
Kayapa	4	1.82	.15	Sometimes
Quezon	4	1.62	.17	Sometimes
Solano	5	1.86	.30	Sometimes
Sta Fe	3	1.73	.15	Sometimes
Villaverde	3	1.53	.20	Sometimes

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49: Never; 1.50 – 2.49: Sometimes; 2.50 – 3.49: Often; 3.50 – 4.00: Always

Table 5 shows the difficulties encountered by the PNP in handling VAWC cases when grouped by the municipalities. Despite the differences in geographical locations, the challenges faced by PNP personnel seem to be perceived similarly across the municipalities, which could imply that the challenges are more related to systemic issues rather than location-specific factors. When asked about their biggest difficulties, the most common answer was that clients often change their minds and withdraw their cases.

A study by Ocampo et al. (2020) found that most complaints involving spouses, based on records from the WCPD at the Sorsogon Police Provincial Office, are not escalated to the prosecutor's office. This is often due to personal reasons. The resolution—whether through legal separation or a mutual agreement—is typically left to the individuals involved. Additionally, similar complaints involving PNP personnel in Sorsogon occur annually, with most cases being quietly resolved through informal separation.

Section 4. Recommendation Based on the Results of the Study

To help address the difficulties faced by the Philippine National Police (PNP) in managing Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases, the researchers crafted infographic materials. Distributed in the form of flyers, these materials can raise public awareness about VAWC and the available resources for victims. These flyers provide clear and concise information about the definition of VAWC, the signs of abuse, and how individuals can seek help. By outlining the legal avenues for protection and the support systems in place, hotlines, and legal assistance, these materials empower potential victims to take action. Distribution can also take the forms of using media outlets, social media platforms, and local outreach programs

In summary, infographics are a practical and accessible way to raise awareness about VAWC, guide victims to the help they need, and support the efforts of the police. Through these materials, the researchers hope to empower communities and improve the handling and prevention of VAWC cases across the province.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The PNP officers handling VAWC cases employ a consistent approach, regardless of their year of service, age, or assigned municipality. Consistent training and protocols are the most significant factors influencing how VAWC cases are managed, more so than individual officer experience or location. In demographics, when the PNP personnel were grouped according to their year of service, age, and municipalities, they faced significantly the same difficulties. Personnel of the WCPD stated that victims often hesitate to file cases against their husbands due to their shared history and relationship. Additionally, poverty is one of the factors that hinders women's ability to pursue legal action. The study shows that the challenges faced by PNP personnel are often linked to certain situations involving their clients or victims. It also points out that these challenges are not caused by the desk officer's lack of understanding of RA 9262.

Recommendations

The Philippine National Police in Nueva Vizcaya is encouraged to continue regular meetings and seminars about VAWC to help law enforcers handle these types of abuse, ensure justice for victims, and create a safer environment for women and children in the entire province of Nueva Vizcaya. These training programs are essential in ensuring that police officers are equipped with the necessary knowledge about the relevant laws, such as the Republic Act No. 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004. This law and other supporting laws were designed to protect women and children from all forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological violence.

The Criminal Justice Education Department is strongly encouraged to continue organizing seminars and awareness programs to educate students about the complexities of crimes involving VAWC. Providing such educational initiatives helps future criminal justice professionals develop the awareness and preparedness needed to identify, respond to, and prevent these forms of abuse effectively.

For criminology students, active participation in seminars and educational programs on VAWC is essential. These learning opportunities will equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and empathy to address these sensitive cases. By deepening their understanding of the legal, social, and psychological dimensions of VAWC, they will be better prepared to support survivors and uphold justice with compassion and competence.

Future researchers may conduct further research on VAWC because of the limited availability of similar studies in the academic literature and within the context of the Philippines. Additionally, such research is essential for understanding the full scope and impact of this violence.

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