This submission explores the effects of Spice, a class B drug, in regards to its use, dealing and resulting anti-social behaviour in a concentrated area of Sheffield City Centre and the work carried out by the City Centre Neighbourhood Policing Team in response to this.

Scanning:

The properties of Spice, its legal status and effects on users are explained. There was a rapid increase in the prevalence of the drug in South Yorkshire in 2017. It's popular with the rough sleepers and beggars of the city centre, resulting in public order incidents, assaults and the magnification of homelessness in the city. The issue has been highlighted in local and national media. This issue has produced a detrimental impact on local businesses, the National Health Service (NHS), Police and other partners.

Analysis:

The complex nature of the environment facilitating this behaviour is explored. The issue occurred around a Cathedral. The moral conflicts Cathedral staff suffered were extremely influential in this project. To the rear of the Cathedral is a rough sleeper's day centre, acting as an anchor point for Spice users, therefore attracting dealers. There was a changing model of informal supply, with significant intelligence gaps. The harm being caused was complex, with numerous victims being established from the vulnerable users, to staff of local businesses being scared to come to work. There were no viable treatment pathways out of addiction, meaning demand was only increasing.

Response:

All elements of the problem analysis triangle were targeted. The environment was changed with target hardening and the removal of a key piece of street furniture. The offenders were targeted through intelligence development and key suppliers were stop searched and arrested, with Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) and bail conditions used. The businesses who were

identified as victims were regularly informed of ongoing work and provided crime prevention advice and training. There was a new drop in clinic and outreach project established by support services to aid the users reliant on Spice.

Assessment:

Significantly, there has been a large reduction in the Office of National Statistics (ONS) crime severity score, and the level of crime in the area. The team will seek to work with the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure legislation is used most effectively. There has been positive feedback received from some surrounding businesses stating there has been an improvement in the area.

Scanning

Spice is a colloquial name for Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists (SCRAs). They are a group of drugs that affect the same brain receptors as cannabis but with wildly different results. Smoking Spice can result in users suffering from paranoia, confusion, violent behavior, vomiting and unconsciousness. In the UK, the most common method of production is to spray certain chemicals onto dried matter, often herbs that look like cannabis. These chemicals can differ in strength and composition. Due to its perceived similarity to cannabis users do not fully understand its dangers.

Initially SCRAs were legal to possess or supply as "plant food" or "incense". Efforts to outlaw these specific chemicals were frustrated by the producers making small changes in the chemical structure. Ultimately however, the national impact of the drug led to the implementation of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, generating a blanket ban on all psychoactive substances (unless specified). This blanket ban meant it was illegal to supply, manufacture or import the drug, or possess it in a custody facility. In January 2017 SCRAs became a class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 – meaning in addition to the above, possession was now illegal.

In South Yorkshire the issue of Spice became a problem in 2017, spiking in August and continuing to increase from that point. The two graphs, Figures 1 and 2,i show how the problem concentrated around Sheffield (UK's fifth largest city) and Doncaster.

Figure 1: Spice reports Force wide 2017

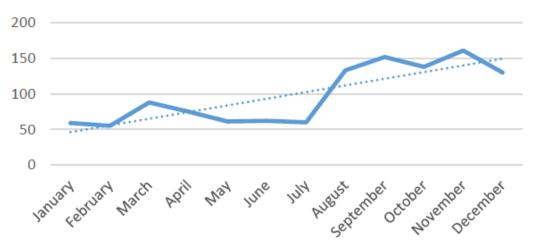


Figure 1 Spice reports Force wide 2017

Spice reports 2017 by District

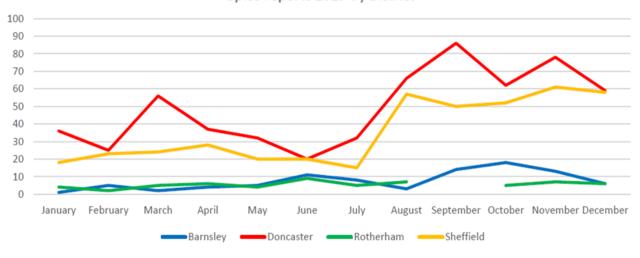


Figure 2 Spice reports 2017 by District

Spice use became particularly widespread amongst rough sleepers and street drinkers in Sheffield City Centre. Traditionally this cohort used alcohol, opioids and cocaine derivatives alongside prescription drug abuse, yet these became replaced by a reliance on Spice. Its popularity was because 'it's cheap, [and] it's strong'ⁱⁱ allowing users to pass large parts of the day under its influence.

The use of the drug differed from other controlled drugs as its supply and consumption were highly visible. In Sheffield city centre, as in other towns across the UK, users suffered its effects in the street and public spaces of the city. They often collapsed and vomited across pavements, doorways and benches or became violent. This generated an outcry in local and national media. The impact of Spice was described as 'one of the most severe public-health issues we have faced in decades' in an open letter written by 20 of the country's police commissioners in 2018.ⁱⁱⁱ

National newspapers produced the following headlines:

'Rise of the zombies: Cheaper and more addictive than crack, Spice is the synthetic drug that turns users into the 'living dead' in minutes and is ruining lives across Britain'iv

'Britain's 'ZOMBIE' apocalypse: 'Spice' users slumped in town centre is latest shocking proof of drug's 'devastating' blight on UK communities'

Sheffield's local newspapers reported on the use of Spice in the city too. The initial discourse featured in these headlines dehumanised users, frequently describing them as 'zombies.' Users were regularly filmed when heavily under the influence of the drug, with these images posted across social media and used by the press.



Figure 3 National and Local Newspaper Headlines

For Sheffield, the area surrounding the city's Cathedral and its forecourt became the epicentre for Spice use in the city, attracting numerous users and also dealers of Spice to the area. The Cathedral is in the heart of the city, near to many services, a pedestrianised shopping zone, and bordered by a main tram stop. The forecourt is surrounded by various business from solicitors to cafes. Crucially, attached to the rear of the Cathedral is a rough sleepers day centre, known as the Archer Project.



Figure 4 Map of Cathedral and surrounding area



Figure 5 Image of Cathedral

The consumers of Spice in this area, gathered in groups, varying in sizes between 5 and 30. They were generally males aged between 20 – 50 and often rough sleepers and beggars. This exaggerated the issue of homelessness and vagrancy in the city, when in fact the problem is limited. It gave the impression of an epidemic and wide spread drug use in the city. A survey of business owners provided comments such as:

'I witness drug taking on an hourly basis, my staff and clients are scared to come to the shop.'

'There is also large amounts of associated anti-social behaviour with the consumption of Spice. We often hear them shouting, swearing and screaming at each other, and sometimes to members of the public. We have witnessed fights on the forecourt.'

'As a small business... I don't think we'll survive if this problem carries on.'

The concerned members of the public will often call ambulances when they see a user collapsed on the street, leading to a high demand on the NHS and Yorkshire Ambulance Service – stretching limited resources.

Additionally, the use of Spice creates problems for the police as demand is generated in the form of concerned callers, highlighting those collapsed on the effect of Spice and general anti-social behaviour (ASB), with large groups of users causing members of the public to feel intimidated. Furthermore, an element of violent crime emerged, as competing suppliers brought weapons and disorder to the Cathedral area. These issues combined to make a complex problem, played out on the forecourt of the city's Cathedral, in public view. They became the focus of the city centre's Neighbourhood Policing Team.

Analysis

To gain a better understanding of the problem the team travelled to Manchester, the UK's third largest city, which was experiencing a more embedded problem with Spice. The knowledge and understanding of the practices that had worked and those that had not, were invaluable lessons for the team.

This was later augmented with the facilitation of national and regional Spice conferences in Sheffield. This furthered our understanding of best practice and increased the effectiveness of the team's responses.

Victims

As the Cathedral, surrounding businesses and the public were victims it was important to ascertain their views. This was achieved through a series of meetings and surveys. Engaging with Cathedral staff ensured negotiation could take place between the deanery and the police as viewpoints often differed widely. It was important to frame the responses in the context of their needs as an organisation.

The complexity of the environment contributed to this problem significantly. The issues with Spice consumption and the associated ASB centred on the Cathedral. The Cathedral's status in this scenario is complex, when framed in relation to the Problem Analysis Triangle (Felson and Cohen, 1979). As a victim, its staff are regularly suffering from the ASB and experiencing decreased turnover of visitors and revenue. As a guardian it owns the land where the offences are being committed and it is a super controller, being landlord and patron of the Archer Project.

The Christian orthodoxy of the deanery meant there was a reluctance to take any measures that may detract from the public enjoying the area, or that may hinder vulnerable people access to the Church, however it did not want Spice consumption to continue on the grounds. The

complexity, and almost contradictory nature of the situation can be illustrated in a particular example. On occasions Spice was being consumed in the toilets of the Cathedral café; the Cathedral deanery wanted to prevent this but declined to restrict access by installing locks on the toilet doors. This lack of intervention allowed ASB to go unhindered around the Cathedral and Spice use continued. Yet, the deanery would then request police presence on a Thursday morning to move on all the Spice users before a mother and toddler group commenced.

Similarly staff from businesses surrounding the cathedral said they were afraid to come to work and had no idea how best to help users that collapsed often inappropriately calling paramedics and police. Of the 13 business that surrounded the Cathedral 100% expressed concerns regarding Spice use in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral .

Location

The Archer Project is a day centre for rough sleepers, housed in the rear of the Cathedral building; with a strong Christian influence. The staff want to work with all users, and understand that any progress made with these vulnerable people will often take place over several years. It is open throughout the week and attracts a significant number of rough sleepers and vulnerable individuals. These individuals are the main cohort consuming Spice.

Spice is favoured with rough sleepers because of its potency, cheapness, longevity and ease of use in public spaces. The Project attends their basic needs, offers support and facilitates access to other services. Their ethos, combined with facilities provided ensured Spice users regularly attended the project, even allowing access to those suspected of supplying Spice. This created a captive market for those supplying Spice. Users would frequent the area to attend the project, and the dealers would attend to sell their Spice. This hot spot was necessary for the drug market to function due to the high volumes required to make the trade profitable, as the cost was so low and the potency so high.

The most conspicuous micro location for Spice use was a large 'L' shaped bench on the front of the Cathedral forecourt. The bench differs from the other benches on the forecourt, as it has a high back. When users enter the catatonic state caused by Spice they are able to lean back, rather than falling to the floor. Large groups would often gather here, supplying and consuming Spice amongst themselves.

An environmental survey highlighted this bench as a hotspot for Spice use yet it was difficult to establish bench ownership. Although ultimately owned by the Cathedral, they had outsourced maintenance to the council, who had in turn outsourced this to another agency – ownership had become diluted and the bench was dilapidated and surrounded by litter.







Figure 6 Images of the large bench, frequently covered in litter

Offenders

The wider context of this problem also needs to be acknowledged. Research around Spice finds prisons are suffering high levels of Spice use. Our engagement with users supported this, we often found the majority of whom had first tried the drug whilst in prison and become reliant. Sheffield is in close proximity to Doncaster, which has several prisons, and on release individuals migrate back to Sheffield.

In regards to the characteristics of supply of the Spice in Sheffield, there were significant gaps in knowledge. It was seen that the model of street level supply was fluid - it was often a group of individuals pooling resources or an individual (who frequently changed) would buy a bag of Spice and share with others. However, little was known about how Spice was being produced or imported into Sheffield, and who supplied it to street level dealers. This lack of intelligence meant that the supply could not be stemmed.

Working with the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services (DACT) we found no treatment options for those reliant on Spice (due to the fast emergence of the problem). Users reported that the substance was more addictive than crack or heroin and that the withdrawal was more brutal. These services were unable, at this time, to offer users a treatment pathway as it was unclear what kind of effective treatments could be offered and there was no substitute. The number of addicts would not decrease as there was no viable recovery pathway, meaning the demand for the drug would only increase. Further, the individuals using Spice often lead chaotic lifestyles and would frequently miss appointments.

Response

The 25 techniques of situation crime prevention (Cornish and Clarke, 2003) were reviewed to develop a response. All sides of the problem analysis triangle were considered.

Victims

A police response to a catatonic user would generally include basic first aid and often prevent further resources being required. However, if a member of the public came across the user, paramedics would be called and a hospital visit would often follow. To quell the concerns of businesses and reduce inappropriate use of paramedics and demand on the NHS, DACT delivered a series of training events for businesses around Spice and its users. The training increased knowledge of the drug, how recognise symptoms and when to call emergency

services. Over 200 people from local businesses have attended this training so far, including employees from the Archer Project. This empowerment of businesses and staff adds to the sustainability of the project.

Locations

The key locations were the Archer Project and the bench on the forecourt.

Working alongside the City Council we considered moving or closing the Archer Project.

However, without the Archer Project there would be no services for the most vulnerable rough sleepers, and there was no political appetite for such a drastic solution.

Working with the Archer Project it was acknowledged persistent problematic users and dealers of Spice needed to be prevented from accessing the project and creating this anchor point.

Initially there was a reluctance to alter the generous admissions policy, but following a series of incidents (including staff assaults), it was agreed to change this. The change denied access to those who were recognised as not requiring the service; were suspected of supplying Spice; or who persistently caused harm or disruption to other users or staff.

The Bench

The bench's state of disrepair, the litter and its popularity amongst Spice users was addressed at a meeting with all stakeholders. The contractor employed by the council to maintain the bench would not carry out their obligations as they feared contact with the Spice users. The Cathedral deanery initially refused to remove the bench for fear of hindering wider public access. Our initial response was to conduct patrols to remove the Spice users, and facilitate maintenance. We hoped that this would allow the bench to be reclaimed by the general public. This was not the case, as users returned once the police left. With no other viable alternative, we approached the deanery with a cogent argument for removal of the bench. As the problem persisted, the

removal was agreed and this took place. This had a significant effect as there was no longer an obvious congregation point for the Spice users who stopped meeting at this micro location.

Offenders

The users are vulnerable individuals with complex needs. To reduce offending and stem the demand for Spice, DACT commissioned a more flexible mobile treatment van to be located near to the Cathedral, to provide support and treatment for those reliant on Spice. This catered to the chaotic lives of the users who are unable to keep conventional drug treatment appointments. A city centre clinic established specifically for Spice was opened, the first of its kind in the UK. This offers a treatment pathway out of Spice addiction rather than just offering harm reduction.

Informal surveillance was also increased. Local businesses were encouraged to submit intelligence on Spice dealers and these were targeted, stopped and searched. The users and dealers were then managed as sources of intelligence so that the next tier of supply can be targeted. This has resulted in several arrests for both Possession With Intent to Supply (PWITS) and possession of Spice. Often drug offences occurred in conjunction with other offences such as possession of offensive weapons. There was a difficulty in remanding those arrested for PWITS due to the time delay in forensic analysis of the substance, therefore bail conditions have been tailored to prevent a suspect from entering the Cathedral area. The extra intelligence gathered on the problem supported a series of search warrants in Sheffield leading to a significant seizure of Spice. Criminal Behaviour Orders are being applied for to permanently exclude these individuals from the Cathedral area.

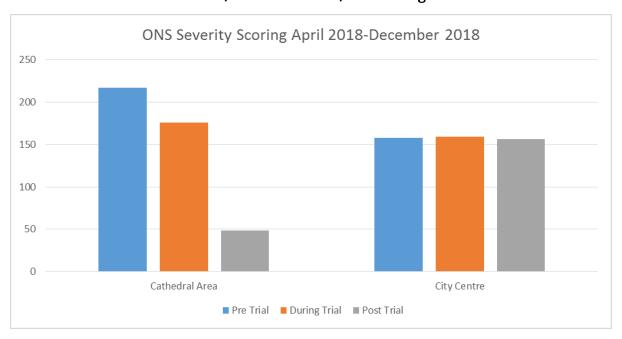
Daily hi-visibility patrols were carries out using the hotspot model (Ariel, 2015). This has ensured daily hi-visibility patrols of the area have been conducted by Police Community Support Officers (known as PCSOs these are non-sworn uniformed officers with limited enforcement powers). Dispersal notices were issued by police officers and PCSOs. These are

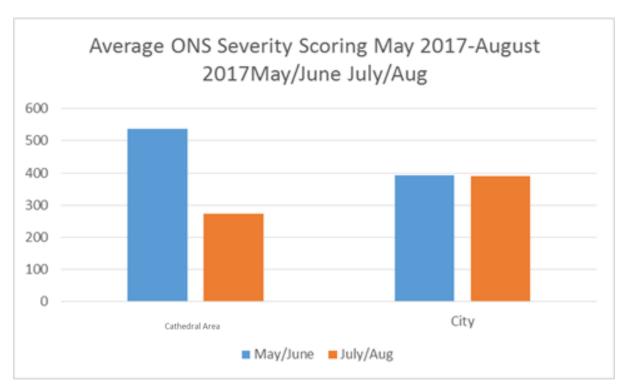
powers granted under Section 35 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. It allows the police to disperse individuals from a specified area for up to 48hrs if deemed necessary to remove or reduce the likelihood of crime and disorder, or prevent members of the public being harassed, alarmed or distressed.

Assessment

When moving into the assessment phase we have reviewed both qualitative and quantitative data. We requested crime and incident data from the Cathedral area and surrounding streets, based on the area shown in figure 5^{vi} , which shows some success. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have developed a weighted measure of recorded crimes, known as the 'Crime Severity Score.' The system adds a 'severity' score to each crime type (the scoring was created based on five years' worth of custodial sentences, community orders and fines). As well as considering the volume of the offences, the scores also reflect the harm of the offence on society and the demands placed on the police. The ONS severity scoring was used in this assessment to understand whether there has been any changes in the severity of crimes within the Cathedral area throughout the period.

Figure 7^{vii} highlights the average ONS severity score in each period for the Cathedral Area and the city centre more widely. The data focuses on a pre-trial period, April-June 2018, the trial period of July-September 2018 when a large volume of work was being carried out around the Cathedral, and the post-trial period of October – December 2018. Any considerations of seasonality can be refuted by considering the data for the warmest months and comparing with Sheffield as a whole.





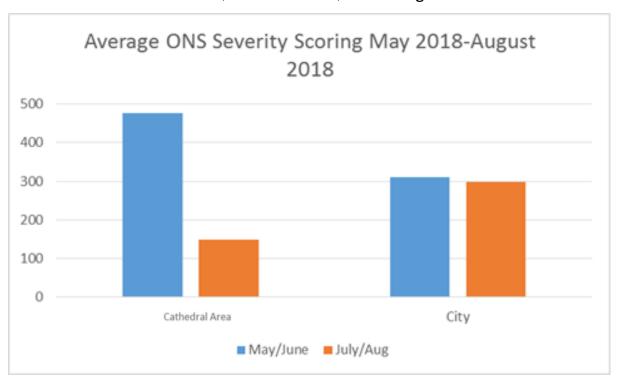


Figure 7 ONS Severity Scoring

This shows there has been a 72% reduction in the average ONS severity score for crimes within the Cathedral area. The score has also been compared to the city centre in general, where the score has remained relatively stable. This is a significant reduction, and shows a decrease in the severity of the crimes being committed in the area after the work had been carried out.

Monthly data has also been provided detailing the amount of crime and incidents around the area from January 2017 to April 2019. This data encapsulates all incidents and crime in the area, not just those that mentioned Spice. This is to ensure a true reflection of the volume of crime and incidents resulting from Spice use has been recorded, and not excluded relevant crimes, such as public order incidents or assaults. The data (figure 8) will shows that during the height of the project (Summer 2018) where there was proactive police work and a sustained presence around the Cathedral, that there was an increase in recorded crimes. This is to be expected, due to the work being carried out, and the crimes recorded resulting from this. However, after the project, there was a decrease in crime and incidents by 39% in the following 3 months following. Incidents in general have not shown a constant decline. The volume of crime has

remained at this diminished level, more reflective of the level of crime before Spice became an issue in Sheffield, in the Summer of 2017. This suggests that amount of crime has reduced due to the work carried out around the Cathedral. It was recognised that section 35 notices, combined with the hotspot patrols had a lasting deterrent effect on the area. Due to the project taking place recently, we are unable to directly compare the amount of incidents and crime a year later, but the data does appear to show the volumes decreasing.

Data has also been provided on a monthly basis for crime and incidents at the Archer Project (Figure 9)^{ix}, this shows that during the project, crime and incidents increased, mirroring what was seen in the Cathedral area, but in the 3 months following the project there was a 59% reduction in crime and incidents.

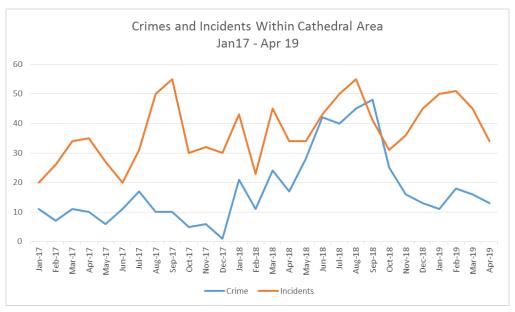
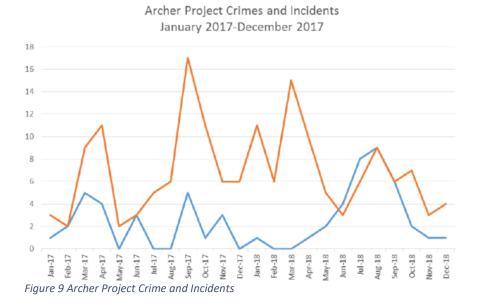


Figure 8 Crime and Incidents within the Cathedral Area



A combination of proactive and response policing has resulted in 17 investigations into the possession of Spice and 12 investigations into supply offences leading to 20 prosecutions. For those charged with possession, the Magistrates have often sentenced defendants to a low level fine. In regards to the investigations for supply they have mainly occurred in conjunction with weapon or public order offences. One male was found guilty of PWITS of Spice, affray and possession of an offensive weapon. He was sentenced to a 12 month community order, rehabilitation activity, 180 hours of unpaid work and a victim surcharge of £80. It is felt the sentences being received by individuals in the Magistrates' Court illustrates a disconnect between the ASB members of the public are being subjected to and the sentences being received in court. The current sentences are not felt to produce the required deterrent or rehabilitative effect for those supplying Spice. To further develop the project, it would be beneficial to work with the Magistrates' and Crown Prosecution Service to understand why this is happening.

In regards to the new initiatives from DACT they have seen an increase in Spice users attending the drop in clinic and plan to expand and enhance their outreach activity to more effectively

engage visible Spice users. This is welcomed as it was learnt from the conferences that outreach

work is more successful traditional appointments.

Qualitative data was gathered surveying the 13 businesses around the Cathedral. More than half returned the survey. 50% of businesses that returned the surveys felt that the area surrounding the Cathedral had experienced a slight or large improvement. This sample size is small, however it is significant in the context of surveying the entire population. This can be taken positively, it still needs to address that some businesses surveyed still perceive there has been little change. Some businesses have suffered from burglaries, and although a causal link between Spice use and the burglaries cannot be established, the impact of crime causes independent businesses to feel frustrated within the area.

Despite this, there has been a significant positive feedback and businesses seeing tangible improvements. One business overlooking the Cathedral described the situation at the start of 2018 as 'terrible' with staff 'all terrified coming to work.' They have said that there has been a large improvement in the area and the situation is 'so much better than 6 months ago' with the removal of seating and police patrols. They stated that the police have kept them informed and their confidence in the police had improved. Another organisation overlooking the Cathedral has stated that at the start of 2018 there was 'a constant and obvious selling and usage problem around the whole Cathedral area.' The staff had 'a general feeling of being unsafe in the area.' They have now stated that in the recent months there has been a 'large improvement.'

The Archer Project stated that at the start of the year the situation was 'out of control [with] users collapsing, resulting in numerous 999 calls [and] dealing going on in broad daylight.' They have stated that there has been a large improvement, aided by the increased presence of police and the removal of dealers.

The consumption of Spice and the associated problems it causes was a relatively new problem to Sheffield when this project commenced. It is recognised that Spice use, as with any drug use, is a long-term problem with no panacea and that it is still continuing in Sheffield. The project will continue and long term sustainable solutions will continue to be developed with best practice sought from all partners.

Agency and Officer Information:

Key Project Team Members T/PS 2832 Ben Hanson PC 006 Libby Bettney

Contact details: Libby Bettney PC 006 Snig Hill Police Station Snig Hill Sheffield South Yorkshire UK S3 8LY

01142963891

Elizabeth.bettney@southyorks.pnn.police.uk Benedict.Hanson@southyorks.pnn.police.uk

Appendices / Sources

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