

Are women of Indian Sundarbans living in the dark?

A gender analysis of eye health in the Indian Sundarbans for responsive health systems

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Introduction

- Worldwide **670¹** million people are visually impaired
- **90%** visually impaired people live in low to middle-income countries (LMICs)
- India alone contributes 22% of the world's visually impaired, while it is home to 12.9% of world's aged population

Gender and eye health

- **64%** of blind people are women²
- Globally, the ratio of female to male visual impairment prevalence ranges from 1.5 to 2.22
- This disparity is due to women's: longer life expectancy, limited access to resources, time, lack of mobility, and low perceived value of their own illness

Objective

Explore how gender cross cuts with other social stratifiers to influence the prevalence and health seeking behaviour among those 50 years and above in the Indian Sundarbans

Methods

- Mixed method study
- Eye screening conducted by optometrists; three levels of visual impairments were examined (normal vision, low vision and blindness)
- 34 individuals from 12 villages were interviewed; 24 in-depth interviews were conducted in total

Results

- When gender cross cuts with age, **elderly women** are more likely to develop visual impairments
- **Poor men are less likely** to develop visual impairments **than non-poor women**
- Gender specific education appears to only be effective for elderly males
- **Low perceived severity and importance exists among elderly females** regarding eye care

Figure 1: Level of visual impairments by sex (%)

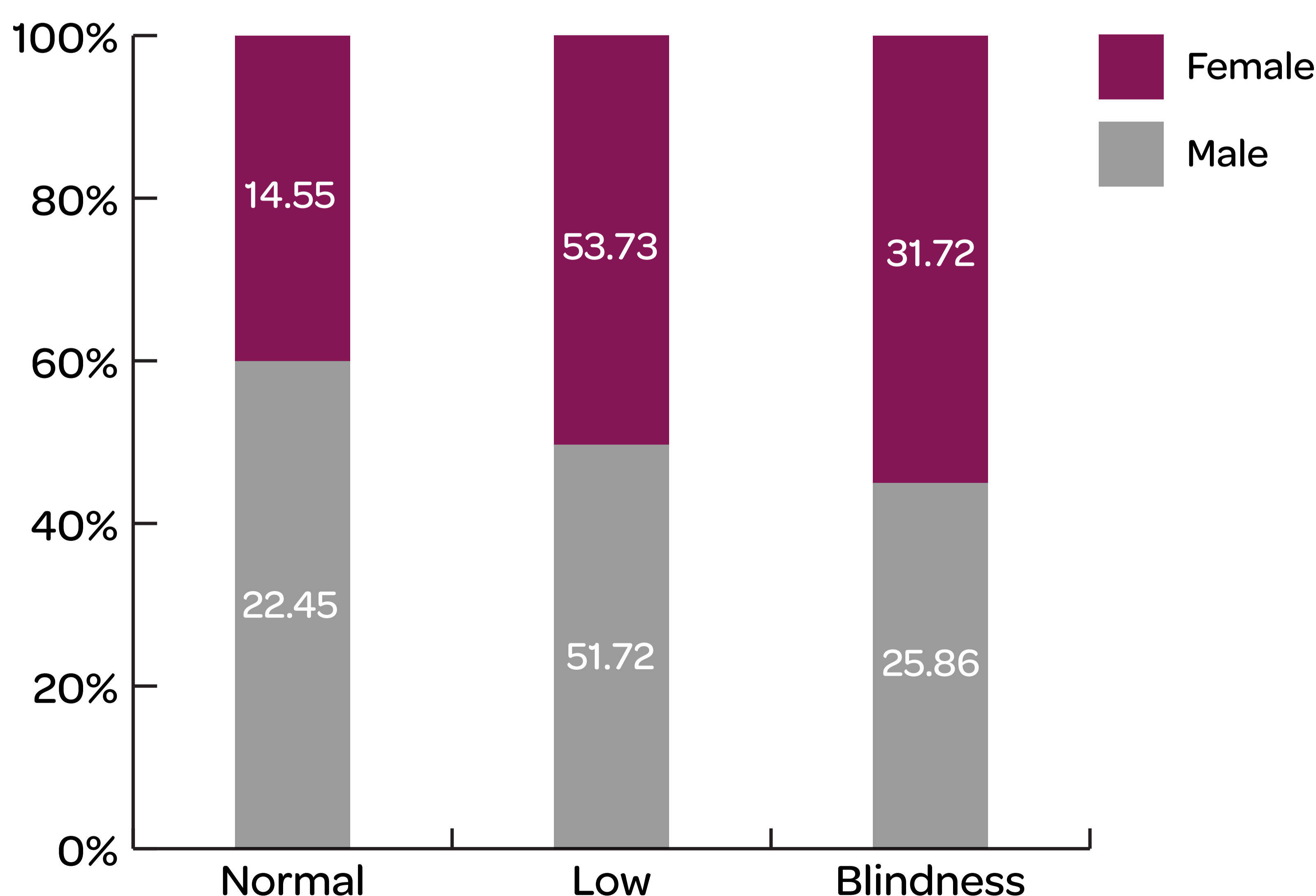
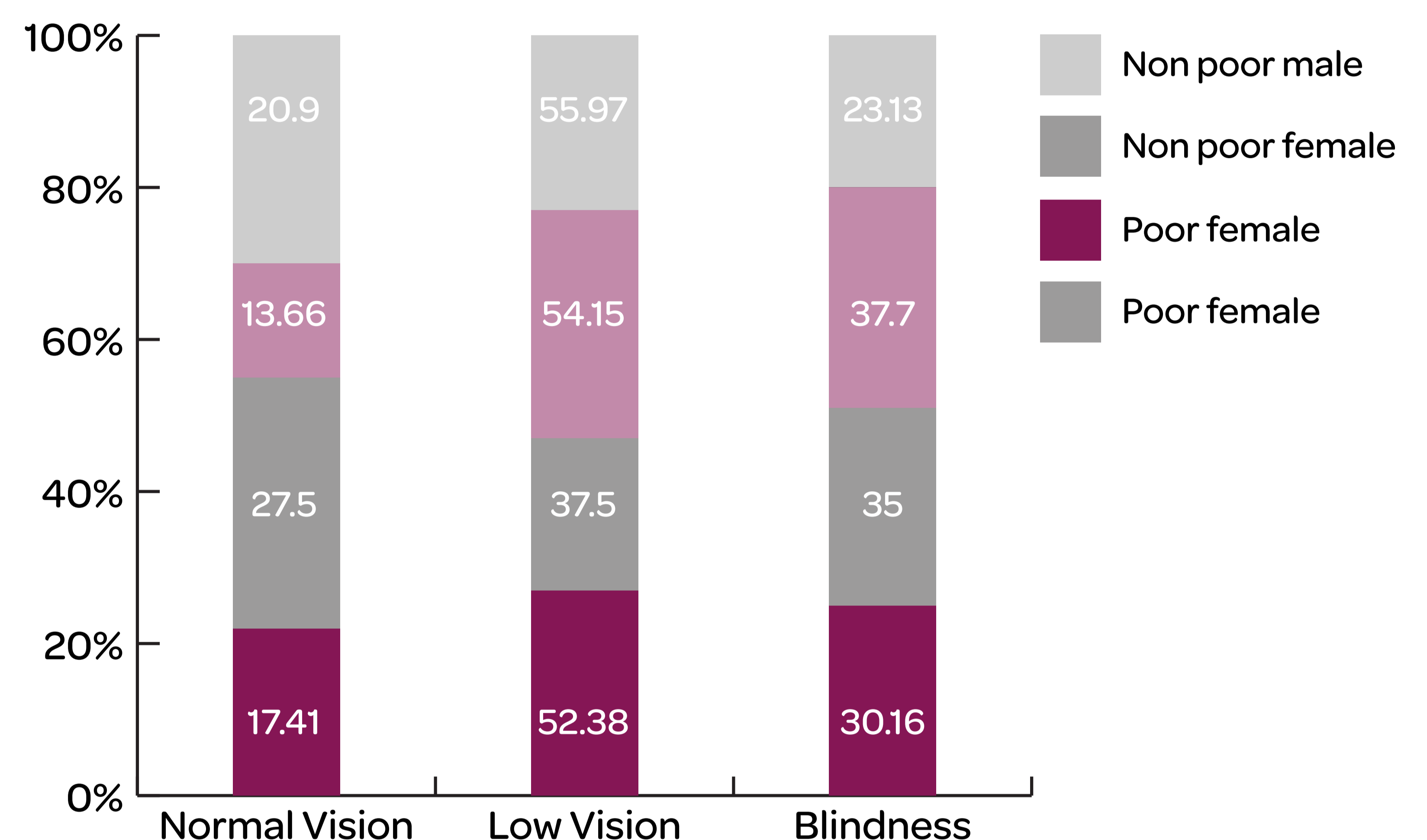


Figure 2: Level of visual impairments (%) by sex and poverty



Conclusion

- When gender cross cuts with other social stratifiers like age, poverty and **education women are in a more vulnerable position** compared to men, both in terms of age and poverty status
- **Given the multi-layered nature of vulnerability** a resilient health system needs to take an **intersectional approach** to ensure effective and gender equitable health care

References

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