Work–Family Conflicts among Female Staff of Higher Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract
Striking balance and maintaining harmony between work and family have always been a great challenge for women in general. This article examines factors that conflict between official responsibilities and family demand among female staff of higher institution of learning in Nigeria. A structured questionnaire is administered to female staff of higher institutions across the country. Hierarchical sampling technique is used to select female staff from each institution. Simple percentage and bar charts are used to present the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The mean responses for each factor are ranked and the first four ranked factors are discussed. Stress, mental fatigue, and psychological burnout/disorder are the major effects observed, while resuming and closing work at convenience is the major mechanism being used by women in tertiary institutions. Other highly ranked mechanisms are using a housekeeper/help, using a childcare center closer to workplace, and using help from colleagues in carrying out official assignments.

Keywords
Work, family, conflicts, female, tertiary, institution

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Introduction

Work–family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict that represents the extent to which an individual’s perception of participation in a role interferes with his/her ability to meet the responsibilities of another role; it is bidirectional, where family can interfere with work. It is burdensome in all career paths when the necessary balance is not maintained. Studies conducted on work–family and family–work conflicts indicate that relationships between family and work are mutual (Adams et al., 1996; Ajala, 2017; Akintayo, 2010; Boles et al., 2001; Greenhaus et al., 2001). Work can disturb family life (work–family conflict [WFC]) while family can impede work life (family–work conflict [FWC]). Both conflicts lead to adverse results in work and family life; for instance, while WFC reduces the satisfaction with the marriage FWC reduces job satisfaction.

The question of how to strike a balance between work and life is attracting increasing attention at both national and international levels (Crompton & Lyonette, 2006). Interest on this issue has grown with the increase in dual-career couples and single-parent households and the concomitant decrease in traditional single-income families. Responsibilities for housework and children are no longer confined to traditional gender roles. The mutual interference of the home and the work domain has been identified as one of the major stressors in the workplace; as a result, employees find themselves struggling to juggle the competing demands of work and family (Byron, 2005).

Rapid entrance of women of all ages into the labor force in the second half of the twentieth century has created another period of structural lag (Moen & Yu, 2000). This is more pronounced in a typical African setup where cultural beliefs and practices often relegate women to background on family decision making. A career-focused woman is faced with contradictory role expectations; as a mother at home, she is expected to be soft, sensitive, adaptable, gentle, unassertive, and domesticated, and from the professional angle, she is expected to be competitive, committed, dynamic, non-sentimental, and act in a “business-like” manner (Misra, 1998). Thus, women assume a lot of conflicting roles that lead to WFC due to time and energy shared across the two spheres of activities. Coping with this not only requires additional physical strength, personal ability, and intelligence on the part of a career-focused women, but it also requires the members of her “role set” (employer and the husband) to simultaneously make necessary adjustments in their expectations (Allen et al., 2000).

Work and family are not compatible; whenever conflict between the two life domains occurs, the consequences are felt on both organization and domestic life role conflict. For employers, such role conflict results
in disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and strained relations with women employees, lower standard of work performance, and disregard for organizational goals (Allen et al., 2000). Since society and organization are not separated, the negative impact of role conflict will have its effects on the society in general in the form of lower standards of performance, lower quality of goods and services, and a growing feeling of interpersonal conflict, which are the obvious results. There is, therefore, a growing recognition of the importance of supporting women in juggling work and family life by policymakers (Evandrou et al., 2002).

Employees in many organizations around the world experience diversities in WFC because of the changing dynamics of work environment and the competitive nature of business today. Findings from Beutell (2010) and Rathi and Barath (2013) showed that conflict in an organization arises when the two spheres of family and work interfere with each other.

Technological improvement along with work environment and work demands such as job burnout, job tension, role conflict, and role ambiguity are contributors of WFC (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Research findings indicate that WFC causes psychological distress and a decline in the rate of turnover (Akintayo, 2010; Boles et al., 2001; Greenhaus et al., 2001; Howard et al., 2004; Kinnunen et al., 2004), as well as leads to outcomes related to psychological distress and life and marital dissatisfaction (Aryee et al., 1998; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998).

The dual roles played by individuals in family and working life can cause conflicts (Erdamar & Demire, 2014). Among Nigerian female bankers, Apodiari and Lasisi (2016) found a strong relation between work–family role conflict and low job performance. Khursheed et al. (2019) studied impingement of demands at work on family and found a negative relationship between long working hours and lack of spousal support with WFC.

In Nigeria, female participation in paid jobs has increased drastically in the recent years, largely due to educational improvement (Ajiboye, 2008), indicating that family structure is moving from conventional single-income family to a double-income family. The new family structure calls for multiple roles to be played within the family–work context resulting in role conflicts caused by limited time among couples.

The impact and significance of WFC among women in higher institutions in Nigeria will be addressed in this study. On analyzing the daily activities of a typical female staff of higher institutions in Nigeria, it is evident that work and family activities are interwoven and usually interfere based on time, strain, and behavior. The adverse effect is far reaching both at the institution and individual levels. Every institution strives for excellence in terms of standard and quality research, but if the human element involved does not have a
stable mind due to family interference, this can to lead to transferred aggression, bad attitude at work, and, ultimately, low productivity, thereby adversely affecting the institutional target. Also, from an individual angle, it could translate to ill-mannered children, recurrent health issues, and broken homes, as a result of not being around to take care of pressing home needs.

Most researchers (Ajala, 2017; Hammer et al., 2005; Netemer et al., 2006; Ugwu, 2017; among many others) on conflicts between family and work focused on relationships between FWC and WFC. While the latter assesses the effect of official responsibilities on family, the former evaluates the effect of domestic responsibilities on work. This research is aimed at identifying various factors that determine WFC, effect of WFC, and coping mechanisms often used by various groups among females working in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Attempts will be made to identify factors that affect each group most.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

In Nigeria, the three major institutions of higher learning are the university, the polytechnic, and the college of education. Universities are primarily charged with advancing the country’s socioeconomic development and competitiveness by providing quality education and quality research at the highest possible level. Polytechnics are established primarily to provide skilled manpower that will be technically and managerially independent in order to provide the much-needed hub for advancement of the country’s technological and industrial aspirations, while colleges of education are charged with providing quality teachers at basic school (primary and secondary) levels. Hence, this study used hierarchical sampling technique by randomly selecting a university, a polytechnic, and a college of education in each of the six geopolitical zones of the country. Female respondents are then randomly selected in each school of choice by ensuring that the selection cut across the three designations (academic, senior administrative, and junior administrative staff) at each school. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were administered and 896 questionnaires representing 89.6% were successfully filled and retuned.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire is then administered to all selected female staff of the institutions. The questionnaire is grouped into four sections. Section A
elicits socio-demographic details of respondents. This includes age, marital status, educational qualification, etc. Section B comprises 19 factors (B1 to B19) that assess determining factors for WFC. Section C also comprises 19 factors that seek to appraise the effect of WFC, and section D comprises 18 factors that respondents are likely to use in coping with WFC as earlier used by Fatoki and Kobiowu (2015). Sections B and C comprise factors that are measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 → Strongly Disagree to 5 → Strongly Agree.

**Data Analysis Method**

Cronbach’s alpha is used to assess instrument validity. Simple percentage is used to present socio-demographic details, while each factor under each section is ranked for each level of socio-demographic characteristic of respondents, and the first four ranked factors are discussed for each level.

**Results and Discussion**

**Data Validity**

Cronbach’s alpha values for the three sections of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1. All the three coefficients are above 0.800 and are found to be adequate.

**Socio-demographic Details of Respondents**

Over 80% of respondents are above 30 years (Table 2), and over 85% of them had been married (widow/widower and divorced) or are married. The implications of these factors on the research output are that a higher percentage of responses is received from those that had experienced conflict (if any) between family and work.

### Table 1. Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients.

| Variable                                      | Cronbach’s Alpha | No. of Items |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Determining factors for work–family conflict  | 0.829            | 19           |
| Effect of work–family conflict                | 0.904            | 19           |
| Perceived coping mechanism of work–family conflict | 0.875            | 18           |
| All sections                                  | 0.901            | 56           |
Table 2. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

| Characteristics                        | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| **Age (years)**                        |           |            |
| Less than 20 years                     | 9         | 1.0        |
| 20–29                                  | 163       | 18.2       |
| 30–39                                  | 279       | 31.1       |
| 40–49                                  | 313       | 34.9       |
| 50 years and above                     | 132       | 14.7       |
| **Total**                              | 896       | 100.0      |
| **Marital status**                     |           |            |
| Single                                 | 141       | 15.7       |
| Married                                | 628       | 70.1       |
| Widow/widower                          | 77        | 8.6        |
| Divorced                               | 50        | 5.6        |
| **Total**                              | 896       | 100.0      |
| **Highest educational qualification**  |           |            |
| SSCE                                   | 54        | 6.0        |
| ND/NCE                                 | 169       | 18.9       |
| HND/BSc                                | 332       | 37.1       |
| Master’s degree                        | 245       | 27.3       |
| PhD                                    | 96        | 10.7       |
| **Total**                              | 896       | 100.0      |
| **Designation**                        |           |            |
| Academic staff                         | 317       | 35.4       |
| Senior administrative staff            | 332       | 37.1       |
| Junior administrative staff            | 247       | 27.6       |
| **Total**                              | 896       | 100.0      |
| **Number of children**                 |           |            |
| None                                   | 161       | 18.0       |
| 1–3                                    | 429       | 47.9       |
| 4–6                                    | 253       | 28.2       |
| More than 6                            | 53        | 5.9        |
| **Total**                              | 896       | 100.0      |
| **Ages of children**                   |           |            |
| 0–9 years                              | 190       | 21.2       |
| 10–18 years                            | 320       | 35.7       |
| 19 years and above                     | 224       | 25.0       |
| **Total**                              | 734       | 81.9       |
| **Working experience**                 |           |            |
| Less than 5 years                      | 220       | 24.6       |

(continued)
Only 18% of respondents did not have a child at the time of the survey. This indicates that over 80% of responses obtained are from women who had at least one child, and this gives credence to questions on how childbearing might interfere with WFC. Also, more than 75% of sampled women have spent more than six years on the job, ascertaining the relevance of experience of respondents to the research questions.

Responses are equally spread across the six geo-political zones and the three classes of higher institutions.

**Determining Factors for Work–Family Conflict**

From the results obtained, as presented in Table 3, *Inadequate working facilities, My pay is not worth the service I rendered, and Resumption of work early and closing lately* are ranked first, second, and third, respectively, by the respondents among all determining factors. The least ranked factor is issue of *gender discrimination at work*.

The results show that women in tertiary institutions experience conflicts between work and family primarily because of inadequacy of working facilities and economy-related factors. Other ranked factors are *family and
Table 3. Determining Factors for Work–Family Conflict.

| Code | Factor                                                                 | Mean   | Rank |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------|
| B1   | I am usually worn out because of long office hours                    | 3.157  | 12   |
| B2   | Overcrowded work schedules                                            | 3.075  | 15   |
| B3   | Extracting work from male subordinate is very tedious                 | 2.730  | 18   |
| B4   | Working with cohesive head or senior staff                            | 3.006  | 17   |
| B5   | Number of official responsibilities                                   | 3.156  | 13   |
| B6   | Inadequate staff over large student population                         | 3.228  | 9    |
| B7   | Heavy teaching load and irregular working hours                       | 3.035  | 16   |
| B8   | I am burdened with more work because of gender discrimination         | 2.701  | 19   |
| B9   | Family and domestic responsibilities                                  | 3.336  | 6    |
| B10  | Inadequate working facilities                                          | 3.516  | 1    |
| B11  | Excessive meetings and administrative assignments                      | 3.185  | 10   |
| B12  | Lack of government policies that respond flexibly to women as a care giver | 3.376  | 5    |
| B13  | The current economic situation in the country requires to do more with less salary | 3.385  | 4    |
| B14  | Resumption of work early and closing lately                            | 3.405  | 3    |
| B15  | Extended family care responsibilities                                 | 3.173  | 11   |
| B16  | Stress of working with students and staff affects health              | 3.315  | 7    |
| B17  | My pay is not worth the service I rendered                             | 3.446  | 2    |
| B18  | If not for the high unemployment rate, I would have quit my job and secured a better job that will give me time for my family | 3.272  | 8    |
| B19  | Overloaded family program                                             | 3.095  | 14   |

domestic responsibilities, stress, and demands of job among others. These findings support those of Ajala (2017).

Effect of Work–Family Conflict

Results of effect of WFC, as shown in Table 4, reveal that “Challenges at the work makes me stressed and nervy at home” is ranked first, followed by “Mental fatigue at work makes discharging home responsibilities difficult” and “It results in psychological burnout and disorder.” Other noted highly
ranked effects are effectiveness on work duties, parenting and mothering, lack of time with family, and inability to meet deadline.

A major observation on the highly ranked effects of WFC is that women in tertiary institutions often sacrifice immensely in balancing their official responsibilities with demands at home. It is, however, noted that childbearing and raising children are the least ranked effects.

**Perceived Coping Mechanism of Work–Family Conflict**

With respect to balancing the effect of WFC, the results (Table 5) show that resuming and closing work at convenience is the number one coping mechanism used by women in tertiary institutions. Other highly ranked mechanisms
are using a housekeeper/help, using a childcare center closer to workplace, and using help from colleagues to carry out official assignments.

**Group Results**

In order to observe variations among different categories of the socio-demographic details, Table 6 presents first four ranked factors on WFC determining factors, effect, and coping mechanisms for each group.

**Determining factors for work–family conflict.** For respondents above 40 years, major determining factors for conflict are the pay they receive and...
Table 6. Ranks of Factors for Socio-demographic Details of Respondents.

| Characteristics               | Determining Factors | Effect | Coping Mechanism |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------|------------------|
| **Age (years)**              |                     |        |                  |
| Less than 20                  | B16, B14, B15, B13  | C12, C14, C18, C15 | D9, D8, D1, D6   |
| 20–29                         | B14, B17, B16, B13  | C11, C7, C19, C6  | D9, D6, D10, D7  |
| 30–39                         | B10, B9, B12, B13   | C5, C9, C14, C7  | D15, D9, D6, D10 |
| 40–49                         | B17, B10, B13, B12  | C11, C6, C7, C10 | D15, D10, D9, D18|
| 50 years and above            | B17, B14, B10, B16  | C3, C1, C6, C19 | D9, D10, D15, D13|
| Total                         | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5  | D9, D15, D10, D6 |
| **Marital status**            |                     |        |                  |
| Single                        | B10, B14, B16, B12  | C7, C11, C5, C9  | D9, D10, D6, D15|
| Married                       | B17, B10, B13, B12  | C10, C11, C5, C7 | D15, D9, D10, D6|
| Widow/widower                 | B12, B14, B13, B18  | C6, C18, C16, C15| D9, D15, D10, D12|
| Divorced                      | B14, B17, B10, B13  | C11, C6, C15, C12| D10, D15, D18, D16|
| Total                         | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5  | D9, D15, D10, D6 |
| **Highest educational qualification** |                 |        |                  |
| SSCE                          | B17, B14, B18, B16  | C10, C11, C7, C6 | D1, D3, D11, D2  |
| ND/NCE                        | B17, B14, B12, B13  | C11, C5, C9, C10 | D5, D4, D1, D2   |
| HND/BSc                       | B10, B17, B13, B12  | C7, C11, C15, C1 | D3, D1, D2, D4   |
| Master’s degree               | B10, B13, B9, B11   | C17, C18, C12, C8| D1, D2, D3, D17  |
| PhD                           | B17, B16, B6, B10   | C15, C3, C1, C6  | D1, D2, D4, D3   |
| Total                         | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5  | D9, D15, D10, D6|
| **Designation**               |                     |        |                  |
| Academic staff                | B10, B16, B6, B14   | C6, C11, C5, C7  | D15, D10, D9, D14|
| Senior administrative staff   | B10, B17, B13, B12  | C7, C11, C1, C6  | D9, D15, D10, D6|
| Junior administrative staff   | B14, B17, B16, B18  | C11, C10, C5, C7 | D9, D10, D18, D15|
| Total                         | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5  | D9, D15, D10, D6|
| **Number of children**        |                     |        |                  |
| None                          | B14, B10, B13, B12  | C7, C11, C5, C19 | D9, D10, D6, D15|
| 1–3                           | B10, B17, B12, B13  | C5, C6, C15, C10 | D15, D9, D10, D6|
| 4–6                           | B17, B10, B13, B6   | C11, C7, C6, C3  | D15, D10, D9, D6|
| More than 6                   | B12, B14, B17, B6   | C9, C6, C11, C10 | D9, D13, D2, D10|
| Total                         | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5  | D9, D15, D10, D6|
| **Ages of children**          |                     |        |                  |
| 0–9 years                     | B10, B12, B17, B9   | C9, C5, C19, C3  | D9, D15, D10, D6|
| 10–18 years                   | B10, B17, B13, B18  | C6, C7, C11, C5  | D15, D10, D9, D6|
| 19 years and above            | B14, B17, B13, B10  | C11, C1, C6, C3  | D15, D9, D12, D10|
| Total                         | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5  | D9, D15, D10, D6|
| **Working experience**        |                     |        |                  |
| Less than 5 years             | B14, B10, B13, B17  | C7, C19, C10, C5 | D9, D6, D15, D10|
| 6–10 years                    | B10, B9, B17, B12   | C11, C5, C9, C7  | D15, D9, D10, D6|
| 11–20 years                   | B10, B17, B12, B13  | C6, C11, C8, C9  | D15, D9, D10, D6|
| Above 20 years                | B17, B13, B16, B9   | C7, C19, C5, C15 | D15, D10, D9, D13|
| Total                         | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5  | D9, D15, D10, D6|
| **Zone**                      |                     |        |                  |
| Southeast                     | B14, B6, B17, B12   | C5, C7, C14, C15 | D9, D6, D18, D10|
| South South                   | B17, B18, B13, B6   | C11, C15, C12, C1| D15, D10, D9, D8 |

(continued)
inadequacy of the working facilities. For the younger ones (below 40 years), complaints about the country’s economic situation and the need to resume work early and close lately are the major determining factors. The two factors are also the major ones for widows/widowers, divorced, SSCE holders, ND/NCE holders, and junior administrative staff.

Married women are also primarily concerned about the pay they receive and their working facilities. For master’s and PhD holders, WFC is determined by domestic responsibilities and large student population. Apart from the working facilities and resumption time, WFC for academic staff is primarily determined by students’ population and stress from working with students, while it is lack of adequate government policies for women as caregiver for senior administrative staff.

Distinguished determining factors for those with more children are large number of students and inadequate government policies for women, while family domestic responsibilities is the major factor for those who have spent longer years on the job.

All the leading determining factors are also observed across different geopolitical zones and schools. However, excessive meetings and administrative assignments are more common to those from the southwest part of the country. Gender discrimination, overloaded family program, and domestic responsibilities are highly ranked among those from the northwestern part. Number of official responsibilities distinguished women from colleges of education from their counterparts from other schools.

**Table 6. (continued)**

| Characteristics     | Determining Factors | Effect | Coping Mechanism |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------|------------------|
| Southwest           | B10, B16, B11, B17  | C10, C11, C16, C14 | D15, D9, D14, D11 |
| North Central       | B10, B16, B17, B13  | C9, C7, C6, C11    | D9, D15, D10, D6  |
| Northeast           | B10, B13, B16, B17  | C11, C10, C7, C1   | D15, D9, D10, D6  |
| Northwest           | B19, B10, B9, B8    | C6, C5, C7, C4     | D10, D13, D17, D16|
| Total               | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5    | D9, D15, D10, D6  |

**School**

| University          | B13, B10, B14, B17  | C7, C19, C10, C5   | D9, D15, D10, D7  |
| Polytechnic         | B10, B17, B13, B14  | C11, C5, C1, C15   | D15, D10, D9, D6  |
| College of education| B10, B5, B14, B12   | C6, C7, C9, C10    | D9, D10, D15, D6  |
| Total               | B10, B17, B14, B13  | C11, C7, C6, C5    | D9, D15, D10, D6  |

**Effect of Work–Family Conflict**

As noted in Table 5, major perceived effects of WFC are stress and nerviness caused by challenges at work, psychological burnout and disorder, difficulty
in discharging home responsibility due to mental fatigues at workplace, and reduction in productivity at home and work. Younger women perceive inability to meet deadline and effect on proper parenting and mothering as the most ranked effects of WFC, while the older ones perceive work duties’ effectiveness while performing home responsibilities and negative impact research activities as major effects. A major distinguishable effect noted for married women is work duties’ effectiveness while performing home responsibilities.

PhD holders perceive work demands and negative impact on research activities as major effects while it is work duties’ effectiveness while performing home responsibilities for those with lower qualifications.

Mental fatigue is a distinguishing effect for academic staff and it is emotional exhaustion for senior administrative staff. Those with more children perceive effect on proper parenting and mothering as the major effect of WFC, while those with fewer children and those with more working experience perceive inability to spend enough time with family.

From different geo-political zones, effects on doing house chores are the distinguishing effects mentioned by those from southeast and south-south; work demands for those from southwest and south-south; increase in emotional exhaustion for those from south-south and northeast; poor health of women for those from northwest; work duties’ effectiveness while performing home responsibilities for those from southwest and northeast; and effect on proper parenting and mothering for those from north central.

Across schools, the major distinguishing factor for those from universities is inability to meet deadline promptly, whereas increase in emotional exhaustion is the major distinguishing factor for those working in polytechnics and effect on proper parenting and mothering for those in colleges of education.

**Perceived Coping Mechanism of Work–Family Conflict**

The most ranked coping mechanisms of WFC by all the respondents are resuming and closing at convenience, using house helpers/keepers, and access to internet at home. However, little variations exist among respondents with different socio-demographic status. Younger women use casual leave and support from junior colleagues to cope with WFC, while the older ones use closer childcare center. Sharing of household chores among children is the distinguishing mechanism used by academic staff, while junior administrative staff use casual leave more often. Those with higher qualifications (M.Sc. and Ph.D.) use leave more often, while those with lower qualifications use support from spouse and women with more children use closer childcare center more. In the study by Muasya (2016), it was discovered that
female university staff who use a house help/keeper are more satisfied with the services they receive as they stay longer with them.

Southeasterners use *access to internet at home more*; those from the south-south use *support from colleagues*; those from southwest use *sharing of household chores among children*; and those from northwest use *flexibility of work schedule* more.

Women from universities use *support from colleagues* more as a coping mechanism, and those from polytechnics and colleges of educations use almost the same factor.

**Conclusion**

Peace and harmony at home and work are essential in effective and efficient discharge of responsibilities. This study examined different factors that could cause conflicts between work and family and their effect on and coping mechanisms among female staff in Nigerian higher institutions of learning. The results obtained showed “long working hours” is a leading factor that militates between work and family among the respondents. Other significant factors are inadequacies in pay and working facilities in the institutions. Different management teams in various higher institutions are therefore encouraged to make working environment more conducive for female staff, and considerations should be given to female staff, especially those at child-bearing and child-rearing ages by making their working hours more flexible and dynamic.

According to responses received, major effects of conflicts between work and family are stress, mental and physical fatigue, psychological disorders, and lower productivity both at work and at home. In order to maximize productivity at work, school management is therefore advised to ameliorate identified major determining factors for WFC. This in turn will reduce stress and fatigue. Productivity will as well increase, and the output will significantly improve.

Resuming and closing work at convenience, especially when the workload is overwhelming, is the leading coping mechanism that women in higher institutions utilize to reduce conflicts between work and family. They also use housekeeper/help and a childcare center closer to workplace. Various management teams are therefore advised to encourage establishment of childcare centers within institutions.

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