

Academic Stress And Mental Well-Being Among Senior High School Students: A Descriptive Correlational Study

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Abstract

The senior high school students are greatly concerned about academic stress as they try to balance the needs of the different types of classes and prepare themselves for college and their future careers. This study investigated the degree of academic stress, the degree of mental health, and the correlation between the two variables among senior high school students in selected schools in the Philippines. A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was utilized as 95 students from Grades 11 and 12 in the STEM, ABM, HUMSS, and TVL strands were surveyed. These students were randomly selected and evenly distributed across four groups. Academic stress was measured using an adapted Academic Stress Scale and mental health was measured using an updated Psychological Well-Being Scale. The reliability of both instruments was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Results revealed that the respondents had low overall academic stress level (overall weighted mean = 2.21) and high to moderate level of mental health (overall weighted mean = 4.28). The Pearson correlation coefficient was -0.92 ($p < 0.001$) which indicates very strong negative relationship between academic stress and mental health. The results showed that the mental health of the respondents significantly deteriorates as academic stress increases. The study emphasizes the significance of mental health programs, the supportive classroom environment, and the manageable academic standards of SHS students to sustain their mental health well-being.

Keywords: *Academic stress; mental health; psychological well-being; senior high school students; Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

The Senior High School (SHS) level represents a critical phase in the Philippine educational system, where students are introduced to specialized academic strands that prepare them for higher education, employment, and future careers. This educational transition provides opportunities for intellectual growth, self-discovery, and career exploration. However, it also exposes students to increasing academic demands that may adversely affect their mental well-being. As adolescents navigate academic expectations while simultaneously undergoing important developmental changes, understanding the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being has become an important concern in both education and mental health research.

Academic stress refers to the psychological and emotional strain experienced when students perceive that academic demands exceed their available coping resources. The present study is anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which explains that stress results from an individual's cognitive appraisal of environmental demands and perceived coping capacity. According to this theory, academic demands do not automatically produce stress; rather, stress occurs when students evaluate these demands as exceeding their ability to manage them. Consequently, prolonged exposure to unmanaged academic stress may negatively influence students' emotional, psychological, and social well-being. This theoretical perspective provides the conceptual basis for examining the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being among Senior High School students.

In this study, academic stress is conceptualized through four interrelated dimensions: workload and examinations, which involve multiple academic tasks, deadlines, and assessment demands; performance pressure, referring to expectations from parents, teachers, and peers within competitive learning environments; academic self-perception, which reflects students' confidence in their academic abilities, decision-making, and concerns regarding future academic success; and time management and future anxiety, which encompass difficulties balancing academic responsibilities with personal obligations and concerns regarding college admission and career preparedness.

Mental well-being, on the other hand, refers to students' emotional, psychological, and social functioning. Students with high levels of mental well-being are generally better able to cope with stress, establish meaningful interpersonal relationships, adapt to academic challenges, and maintain satisfactory academic performance. Conversely, prolonged and poorly managed academic stress has been associated with anxiety, depression, burnout, reduced motivation, emotional exhaustion, and poorer academic outcomes (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Son et al., 2020).

Existing literature consistently demonstrates that academic stress is an important determinant of students' mental health; however, important gaps remain. Several studies have reported that increased academic demands are associated with poorer psychological outcomes among students. For example, Barbayannis et al. (2022) found that greater perceived academic stress was significantly related to lower mental well-being among college students. Similarly, Son et al. (2020) reported increased stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among students facing heightened academic responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies by Aristovnik et al. (2020), Wang et al. (2021), Li et al. (2023), and Rahman et al. (2024) likewise

suggest that excessive workload, academic uncertainty, poor time management, and concerns about the future contribute to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced life satisfaction. Collectively, these studies indicate a consistent negative association between academic stress and mental well-being. Nevertheless, most of this evidence has been generated from higher education settings, particularly in Western and East Asian countries, with limited attention given to adolescent learners in secondary education. Furthermore, while previous studies generally agree on the detrimental effects of academic stress, they differ in the stress dimensions examined and often focus on specific student populations, leaving important questions regarding the experiences of Philippine Senior High School students unresolved.

Despite numerous studies on academic stress, limited empirical evidence exists regarding its relationship with mental well-being among Philippine Senior High School students across different academic strands. This represents an empirical gap, as relatively few studies have directly examined these variables among SHS students within the Philippine educational system.

A significant contextual gap also exists because the Philippine K–12 curriculum, implemented in 2013, introduced a unique Senior High School structure that requires students to specialize in different academic strands while preparing simultaneously for higher education and career pathways. These educational demands differ from those experienced by university students and by students in educational systems outside the Philippines. Consequently, findings from international and higher education studies may not fully reflect the experiences of Philippine SHS students.

A methodological gap is likewise evident in the literature. Many previous investigations relied on participants from a single institution or examined only one educational level, thereby limiting the generalizability of their findings. Moreover, few studies have explored differences across SHS academic strands despite the possibility that strand-specific curricular requirements may influence students' levels of academic stress and mental well-being.

Finally, a practical gap remains. Although schools increasingly recognize the importance of promoting students' mental health, there is limited local evidence to guide the development of evidence-based interventions and policies specifically designed for Philippine Senior High School students. Without sufficient empirical evidence, guidance counselors, educators, and school administrators may find it difficult to develop targeted programs that effectively address students' academic stress while promoting positive mental well-being.

By addressing these empirical, contextual, methodological, and practical gaps, the present study contributes to the literature by providing strand-based evidence on the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being among Philippine Senior High School students. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on university students or single-school samples, this research examines students from different academic strands within the Philippine K–12 context, thereby providing findings that are more relevant to educational policy, school mental health programs, and guidance interventions.

Specifically, this study aims to: (1) determine the level of academic stress among Senior High School students; (2) determine the level of mental well-being among Senior High School students; and (3) determine the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being

among Senior High School students. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that can inform the development of school-based stress management strategies, mental health promotion programs, and guidance interventions tailored to the needs of Philippine Senior High School students.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, setting, participants and sampling technique, research instruments, data gathering procedure, statistical treatment of data, and ethical considerations employed in the study titled “Academic Stress and Mental Well-Being Among Senior High School Students: A Descriptive-Correlational Study.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being among Senior High School (SHS) students. The descriptive component determined the levels of academic stress and mental well-being, while the correlational component assessed the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables.

A quantitative approach was appropriate because it enables the objective collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to examine relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive-correlational design directly addressed the study objectives by allowing the researchers to measure the existing levels of academic stress and mental well-being and determine whether a significant relationship exists between them without manipulating the study variables. As Polit and Beck (2021) noted, descriptive-correlational research is appropriate for describing variables and examining their relationships in naturally occurring settings. Therefore, this design was the most suitable methodological approach for achieving the objectives of the study.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Laguna Province, specifically in Lake Shore College a private Senior High School offering the academic strands STEM, ABM, HUMSS, and TVL. The school was selected based on its accessibility, institutional approval to conduct the study, and the presence of multiple SHS academic strands, which allowed for the comparison of students across different academic tracks.

The inclusion of a multi-strand private Senior High School was deemed appropriate because academic demands and stress experiences may vary depending on strand specialization. Private schools were also considered suitable for the study due to their structured academic environment and consistent implementation of SHS programs. To maintain confidentiality and comply with ethical research standards, the specific name of the institution is not disclosed.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants were 95 Grade 11 and Grade 12 SHS students from the four academic strands. The sample size was determined using Slovin’s formula with a 5% margin of error applied to a target population of approximately 400 students across the participating schools,

yielding a minimum required sample of 80 respondents. The final sample consisted of 95 respondents, which exceeded this criterion considering the expected attrition. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation from each strand (STEM, ABM, HUMSS, and TVL). This method is recommended when the researcher intends to capture diversity across different subgroups and at the same time, ensuring representativeness (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

To be included in the study, respondents must be actively enrolled in Grade 11 or Grade 12 in a participating school. Students who did not complete at least 90% of the survey instrument were eliminated from the final analysis to ensure data integrity.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of two main scales. The Academic Stress Scale was used to measure students' level of academic stress in terms of workload, examinations, time management, and expectations from teachers and parents. On the other hand, the Mental Well-being Scale assessed students' emotional and psychological well-being, including their level of optimism, emotional stability, and ability to cope with stress.

The scales were adapted from previously validated instruments used in recent studies on student mental health (Wang et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2024), with modifications to suit the Senior High School context.

All items in Parts II and III were measured using a 5-point Likert scale:

1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

Likert scales are widely used for measuring attitudes and perceptions due to their reliability and ease of interpretation (Ankur Joshi et al., 2015).

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the school authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study, and informed consent was secured before administering the questionnaire.

The surveys were distributed either online or in person, depending on accessibility and school policies. Data collection was conducted within a period of one to two weeks, ensuring sufficient time for participants to respond.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools to ensure accurate interpretation. Frequency and percentage were utilized to describe the demographic profile of the respondents, providing a clear overview of their distribution according to variables such as age, gender, grade level, and academic strand. Meanwhile, the mean was used to determine the levels of academic stress and mental well-being, allowing for an overall assessment of the respondents' experiences and perceptions.

Interpretation of Mean Scores:

4.21 – 5.00	Very High
3.41 – 4.20	High
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
1.81 – 2.60	Low
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) – used to determine the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being

The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$, which is the standard criterion for statistical significance in social science research (Andy Field, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study.

Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were given the right to withdraw at any point without any penalty. To protect their privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not collecting any personally identifiable information. All data gathered were used solely for academic purposes. Prior to participation, respondents were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and procedures of the study. Furthermore, the emotional well-being of the participants was prioritized by allowing them to skip any questions they found uncomfortable.

These procedures align with established ethical principles in research involving human participants, particularly those outlined in the Belmont Report (1979) and the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (2020).

RESULT

This chapter deals with the gathered data that were analyzed and interpreted for the better understanding of the study. The framework of the analysis and interpretation was guided by the problems stated in Chapter 1.

I. Academic Stress

Table 1: The Level of Academic Stress among Senior High School Students

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I am confident that I will be a successful student.	2.08	Low	16
2. I am confident that I will be successful in my future career.	2.10	Low	15
3. I can make academic decisions easily	2.19	Low	9
4. The time allocated to classes and academic work is enough.	2.18	Low	11
5. I have enough time to relax after work.	2.33	Low	5

6. My teachers are critical of my academic performance.	2	Low	18
7. I fear failing courses this year	2.15	Low	14
8. I think that my worry about examinations is weakness of character	2.17	Low	12
9. Teachers have unrealistic expectations of me	2.38	Low	2
10. The size of the curriculum (workload) is excessive	2.36	Low	3
11. I believe that the amount of work assignment is too much	2.5	Low	1
12. I am unable to catch up if getting behind the work.	2.23	Low	7
13. The unrealistic expectations of my parents stresses me out.	2.17	Low	12
14. Competition with my peers for grades is quite intense.	2.25	Low	6
15. The examination questions are usually difficult.	2.20	Low	8

16. Examination time is short to complete the answers.	2.36	Low	3
17. Examination times are very stressful to me	2.19	Low	9
18. Even if I pass my exams, I am worried about getting a job.	2.04	Low	17

All indicators of academic stress were rated within the low level range ($M = 2.21$ overall), indicating that respondents generally did not perceive their academic workload as highly stressful. However, within the low category, higher-rated indicators were associated with workload demands and academic expectations, particularly excessive assignments, perceived teacher expectations, and curriculum load. This suggests that while students are not experiencing high overall stress, their primary sources of strain are concentrated in academic workload and performance-related pressures.

The presence of relatively higher scores in workload and expectation-related items may be explained by the structured and demanding nature of the Senior High School curriculum, where students are required to complete multiple academic requirements across subjects within limited timeframes. Even when stress levels remain low overall, these specific demands can still be perceived as challenging, particularly when deadlines and performance expectations accumulate.

These findings are consistent with Barbayannis et al. (2022), who found that academic stress is primarily driven by workload, deadlines, and perceived performance pressure. Their study emphasized that stress is not only determined by the volume of academic tasks but also by students' appraisal of these demands relative to their coping resources. Similarly, Son et al. (2020) highlighted that academic pressure tends to manifest more strongly in specific stressors such as workload and expectations rather than in a uniform experience of stress across all academic areas.

Overall, the results suggest that although SHS students in this study report low levels of academic stress, targeted pressures related to workload and academic expectations remain present and should be addressed through appropriate academic support and workload management strategies.

II. Mental Wellbeing

Table 2: The Level of Mental Wellbeing among Senior High School Students

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I like most parts of my personality.	4.65	High	6
2. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.	4.80	High	1
3. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.	4.54	High	7
4. The demands of everyday life do not get me down	4.30	Moderately High	11
5. In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.	3.51	Moderately High	1
6. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me	4.10	Moderately High	14
7. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future	4.44	High	8
8. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.	4.23	Moderately High	12

9. I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life	4.43	High	9
10. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.	3.51	Moderately High	16
11. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.	4.75	High	3
12. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world.	4.76	High	2
13 People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.	4.75	High	3
14. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago	4.24	Moderately High	12
15. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.	3.67	Moderately High	15
16. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others	3.40	Moderately Low	18
17. I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.	4.68	High	5

18. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.	3.61	Moderately High	17
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As shown in Table 2, the respondents generally demonstrated a high level of mental well-being ($M = 4.28$), indicating positive psychological functioning, life satisfaction, and adaptive coping tendencies among Senior High School students.

Across indicators, the highest-rated items were associated with life satisfaction, personal growth, and openness to new experiences, suggesting that respondents exhibit strong eudaimonic well-being. In particular, students reported high satisfaction with their life outcomes and a strong appreciation for new experiences, reflecting positive self-evaluation and a growth-oriented mindset. These findings suggest that, despite academic demands, students maintain a positive sense of purpose and personal development.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator, which relates to warm and trusting social relationships, suggests a relatively weaker aspect of social well-being. Although still within a moderate range, this finding implies that interpersonal connectedness may not be as strongly developed compared to other dimensions of well-being. This may reflect the social and academic pressures of the SHS environment, where students may prioritize academic performance over deeper peer or social engagement.

Overall, the results suggest that SHS students in this study demonstrate strong psychological functioning, particularly in terms of self-acceptance and personal growth, but may still benefit from strengthened social support and peer relationship-building initiatives within the school environment.

These findings align with the concept of eudaimonic well-being, which emphasizes personal growth, meaning in life, and self-realization. They are also consistent with studies suggesting that adolescents may maintain relatively positive psychological functioning even in the presence of academic demands when adequate coping resources and adaptive perspectives are present.

III. Relationship between the level of Academic Stress and the level of Mental Wellbeing among Senior High School Students

Table 3: Relationship between the level of Academic Stress and the level of Mental Wellbeing among Senior High School Students

	Pearson-r value	p-value	Interpretation
The level of Academic Stress and the level of Mental Wellbeing among Senior High Schools Students	-0.92** High correlation	<0.001	Significant

**Significant @0.01

Table 3 shows a strong negative correlation between academic stress and mental well-being among Senior High School students ($r = -0.92$, $p < .001$). This indicates that higher levels of academic stress are associated with lower levels of mental well-being, and vice versa. The relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that the observed association is unlikely due to chance.

Based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the obtained correlation coefficient represents a large effect size, indicating a substantial relationship between the two variables. This suggests that variations in academic stress are strongly associated with variations in students' mental well-being.

These findings imply that students who experience higher academic demands and pressure tend to report poorer psychological well-being, while those with lower stress levels tend to demonstrate better emotional and psychological functioning. However, it is important to note that this relationship is associational and not causal, as correlation analysis does not establish directionality or causation between variables.

Overall, the results highlight a strong inverse relationship between academic stress and mental well-being among SHS students, reinforcing the importance of stress management interventions and mental health support within the school environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being among Senior High School students. Overall, the results indicate that students experience low levels of academic stress, suggesting that academic demands are generally perceived as manageable within the current learning environment. Although workload, teacher expectations, and examination demands emerged as relatively higher stressors, these remained within the low category, implying that students are still able to cope effectively with academic requirements.

This finding may be attributed to several contextual factors, including students' adaptation to the Senior High School system, the presence of structured academic support, and the development of coping strategies over time. It may also reflect the effectiveness of school-based interventions and instructional practices that help reduce excessive academic pressure. However, the presence of higher-rated stress indicators suggests that workload and performance expectations remain persistent academic challenges that should not be overlooked.

In contrast, the respondents demonstrated a generally high level of mental well-being, particularly in terms of life satisfaction, personal growth, and goal orientation. This suggests that despite academic demands, students maintain a positive psychological outlook and a strong sense of purpose. These findings align with the concept of eudaimonic well-being, which emphasizes personal development, meaning-making, and self-realization. However, lower scores in relational aspects of well-being suggest that interpersonal connection may be a relatively weaker dimension, highlighting the need for stronger peer support and social engagement within the school environment.

The most significant finding of the study is the strong negative correlation between academic stress and mental well-being ($r = -0.92$, $p < .001$). This indicates that increases in academic stress are associated with substantial decreases in mental well-being. The strength of this relationship suggests that academic experiences play a critical role in shaping students' psychological functioning. Although the overall stress level was low, the magnitude of the relationship implies that even small increases in stress may significantly affect students' mental well-being.

These findings are consistent with previous research. Barbayannis et al. (2022) similarly found that academic stress is strongly associated with poorer mental well-being among students, particularly when academic demands exceed coping capacity. Likewise, Li et al. (2023) and Rahman et al. (2024) emphasized that workload, time pressure, and performance expectations contribute significantly to emotional exhaustion and burnout. The present study reinforces these findings in the context of Philippine Senior High School students, suggesting that the stress–well-being relationship is consistent across educational settings.

In terms of implications, the results highlight the importance of preventive and supportive interventions in schools. Guidance programs, stress management workshops, and academic workload monitoring may help ensure that stress levels remain manageable. Teachers may also consider balancing academic demands with students' well-being by implementing flexible deadlines, formative assessments, and supportive feedback mechanisms. At the policy level,

school administrators may use these findings to strengthen student mental health programs and promote a more holistic approach to academic success.

Overall, while SHS students in this study generally exhibit low academic stress and high mental well-being, the strong inverse relationship between these variables underscores the need for continued attention to student mental health. Maintaining supportive academic environments is essential to prevent stress from escalating and to sustain positive psychological functioning among learners.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between academic stress and mental well-being among Senior High School students. The findings revealed that respondents generally experienced low levels of academic stress and high levels of mental well-being, indicating that students are largely able to manage academic demands within their current school environment. However, despite the low level of stress, a strong negative relationship was found between academic stress and mental well-being ($r = -0.92$, $p < .001$), suggesting that increases in academic stress are associated with substantial decreases in psychological well-being.

Theoretical Implications

The results support the **Transactional Model of Stress and Coping** (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which posits that stress is determined by individuals' appraisal of demands and coping resources. The strong inverse relationship observed in this study reinforces the idea that even when academic stress is not perceived as high, variations in stress levels can still significantly influence students' mental well-being depending on how these demands are appraised and managed.

Educational Implications

The findings highlight the importance of maintaining a balanced academic environment in Senior High School settings. Schools should continue strengthening student support systems such as guidance counseling services, stress management programs, and teacher practices that promote reasonable workload distribution. Even low levels of stress, when unmanaged, may still negatively affect student well-being.

Policy Implications

At the institutional level, school administrators may use these findings to reinforce mental health programs and promote policies that support student well-being alongside academic performance. Integrating well-being monitoring systems and promoting a more holistic approach to education may help sustain both academic success and psychological health.

Future Research Directions

Future studies may expand the scope by including multiple schools across different regions to improve generalizability. Longitudinal research is also recommended to examine how academic stress and mental well-being change over time. Additionally, future research may

explore other influencing factors such as coping strategies, social support, and digital learning environments to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student well-being.

Overall, the study underscores that while SHS students may generally experience manageable academic stress, its strong relationship with mental well-being highlights the need for continuous attention to students' psychological health within educational settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings that academic stress is negatively associated with mental well-being among Senior High School students, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed:

Students. Students are encouraged to strengthen time management skills and adaptive coping strategies, particularly in managing workload and examination demands, which were identified as the most relevant stressors. Engagement in structured study planning and healthy routines such as adequate sleep and balanced lifestyle practices may help maintain psychological well-being. Students should also be encouraged to seek assistance from school support services when experiencing difficulty managing academic demands.

Teachers. Teachers are encouraged to review and balance academic workload, deadlines, and assessment demands to ensure they remain developmentally appropriate for Senior High School learners. Providing clear instructions, realistic timelines, and consistent constructive feedback may help reduce unnecessary performance pressure. Incorporating supportive and student-centered teaching approaches may further enhance students' psychological well-being.

School Administrators and Guidance Counselor. School administrators should strengthen school-based mental health programs, particularly preventive interventions that address academic stress before it escalates. Guidance counselors should implement regular psychosocial check-ins, stress monitoring programs, and structured interventions such as stress management workshops and peer support programs. Ensuring accessibility of counseling services is essential, especially given the observed strong link between academic stress and mental well-being.

Parents. Parents are encouraged to maintain balanced and realistic academic expectations, particularly regarding performance outcomes. Since academic pressure contributes to reduced mental well-being, supportive and non-pressuring communication at home may help buffer stress. Providing emotional support rather than performance-based pressure can contribute positively to students' psychological adjustment.

Policymakers. Education policymakers should consider strengthening the implementation of mental health provisions under the Philippine Mental Health Act (RA 11036) within Senior High School settings. Policies that promote regulated academic workload standards and structured mental health support systems across schools may help reduce the impact of academic stress. Funding support for school-based mental health services is also recommended.

Future Researchers. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of this study by including multiple schools across different regions to improve generalizability. Longitudinal designs are encouraged to examine changes in academic stress and mental well-being over time. Further studies may also investigate additional variables such as coping strategies, social support, and academic self-efficacy to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student mental health.

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