

Relationship between Perceived Social Support and Psychological Well-Being among Police Officers in Kamukunji Sub County, Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Police officers operate under high-stress conditions characterized by traumatic exposure, long working hours, and limited institutional support, all of which threaten their psychological well-being. This study investigated the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among police officers in Kamukunji Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya. The specific objectives were to determine levels of social support, assess levels of psychological well-being, examine the relationship between social support and psychological well-being, and establish whether demographic characteristics moderate this relationship. A quantitative correlational design was employed. The target population comprised 400 officers drawn from six police stations and two police posts. A sample of 216 officers was selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire incorporating demographic items, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and the PERMA-Profilier. The study was guided by Social Support Theory, the PERMA Model of Well-Being, and Self-Determination Theory. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings indicated that most officers reported moderate levels of social support (68.4%), while 20.3% reported high support and 11.3% low support. Similarly, 72.3% of officers reported moderate psychological well-being, 23.7% high psychological well-being, and 3.9% low psychological well-being. Correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between social support and psychological well-being ($r = .722, p < .001$). Gender significantly moderated this relationship, while age, years of service, and rank were not significant moderators. The study concludes that although officers experience moderate support and well-being, optimal psychological flourishing remains limited. Strengthening social support systems and implementing gender-sensitive interventions are recommended to enhance psychological well-being among police officers.

Keywords: Gender, Police Officers, Psychological Well-Being, Social Support.

ABBREVIATIONS

SDT	Self-Determination Theory
MSPSS:	Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support
PERMA:	Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PWB:	Psychological Well Being
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
WHO:	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

Policing is widely recognized as one of the most demanding occupations due to officers' frequent exposure to traumatic incidents, violence, human suffering, public scrutiny, and high levels of organizational pressure. In

addition to operational challenges encountered in the line of duty, police officers often face organizational stressors such as heavy workloads, long working hours, inadequate resources, administrative demands, and limited workplace support, all of which can adversely affect their mental health and overall functioning [8], [9]. Recent studies have shown that these occupational demands contribute to increased risks of psychological distress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and reduced well being among police officers across different countries. Given the critical role that police officers play in maintaining public safety and social order, understanding factors associated with their psychological well being has become an important area of research and policy concern worldwide [9], [24]. In this context, social support emerges as a key factor that may help buffer the negative effects of occupational stress and enhance psychological well being among police officers.

Social support refers to the actual or perceived availability of emotional, informational, and tangible assistance from an individual's social network [33]. In policing, it may be provided through formal mechanisms such as counselling, peer-support programmes, and organizational welfare initiatives, or through informal networks involving family, friends, colleagues, and community members. Evidence suggests that social support can reduce the adverse effects of occupational stress while strengthening resilience, coping, and work functioning among police officers [12]. Globally, studies have demonstrated the importance of supportive relationships in promoting police officers' psychological well-being. In Germany, [37] found that officers who received strong supervisor support reported higher work engagement, while [13] reported better mental health among Swedish female police officers who experienced adequate workplace support. In Canada, [34] found that strong social support networks were associated with reduced risk of PTSD among police officers, whereas [7] demonstrated that managerial support improved problem-solving capacity among U.S. law enforcement officers. Similarly, [18] found that supervisor support enhanced job satisfaction among Hong Kong police officers, while [19] reported that Indonesian police officers valued both emotional and instrumental support when coping with crisis-related stress. Collectively, these findings indicate that social support is an important protective resource in policing, although its effectiveness may depend on organizational, cultural, and contextual conditions.

Psychological well-being is a multidimensional state involving positive functioning, emotional stability, satisfying relationships, purpose in life, personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, and effective management of environmental demands [32], [36]. It is particularly important for police officers because their work involves prolonged exposure to danger, traumatic events, uncertainty, high workloads, and rapid decision-making. International evidence demonstrates the psychological consequences of these occupational demands. In Canada, [34] reported substantial mental health burdens and PTSD among police officers, while [31] found considerable levels of burnout and compassion fatigue among U.S. police officers. In the United Kingdom, [25] associated repeated trauma exposure with recurring mental health problems among police officers, while [25] found that high job demands increased anxiety and depression among British police officers. Similar concerns have been reported in Latin America, where [2] found PTSD among Brazilian military police officers and limited effectiveness of underfunded workplace support programmes. These findings demonstrate that occupational pressures can undermine police officers' psychological well-being and that adequate support is important in mitigating these effects.

Within Africa, the relationship between occupational conditions, social support, and psychological well-being has also received increasing attention, although the evidence remains relatively limited compared with research from high-income countries. [23], for example, found that Nigerian police officers who experienced organizational support reported better psychological well-being than those with limited institutional support. In South Africa, [27] documented substantial levels of burnout among police officers despite the availability of resilience-oriented interventions. Evidence from the region also suggests that informal support may be particularly important where formal institutional resources are inadequate. Similarly, African policing environments are often characterized by resource limitations, high operational demands, and inadequate mental health infrastructure, potentially reducing the effectiveness and accessibility of formal support systems. Nevertheless, much of the available African literature has concentrated on organizational support, burnout, or specific mental health problems, with comparatively less attention given to the contribution of broader social networks and their relationship with the multidimensional aspects of psychological well-being.

In Kenya, police officers operate within similarly demanding circumstances, with studies documenting considerable psychological challenges and limitations in access to mental health support. [35] reported

substantial gaps in access to counselling and psychological support services among police officers, while [20] found that peer counselling produced only limited improvements in psychological outcomes. [26] further highlighted structural and institutional barriers affecting access to support, particularly among female officers. More recent evidence indicates the seriousness of psychological difficulties within the police service, with [21]

reporting high levels of PTSD and suicide risk among Kenyan police officers. Although these studies demonstrate the psychological vulnerabilities of Kenyan officers and the limitations of existing support structures, they provide insufficient evidence on how different sources and dimensions of social support; including family, peers, supervisors, and organizational systems, relate to psychological well-being. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to specific dimensions of well-being, such as self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Existing evidence from other populations indicates that the availability, accessibility, and quality of social support can influence coping and psychological outcomes [10], [17], [29] suggesting the need for greater investigation within the Kenyan policing context.

This gap is particularly relevant in Kamukunji Sub-County, Nairobi County, where police officers work in an urban environment characterized by exposure to crime, operational pressure, demanding workloads, and constrained institutional resources. Although social support has been identified as a potential protective factor against occupational stress [12], [13], [34] there remains limited empirical evidence establishing how available support systems relate to the psychological well-being of police officers in such high-pressure settings in Kenya. In addition, demographic characteristics such as gender, rank, and years of service may influence access to social support and psychological well-being, yet these factors have received limited attention in the Kenyan context. The lack of context-specific evidence makes it difficult to determine which forms of support are most relevant to police officers working in resource-constrained urban environments. Therefore, examining the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among police officers in Kamukunji Sub-County is important for generating evidence that can inform more responsive welfare, counselling, and psychosocial support interventions within the police service.

The study is grounded on the Social Support Theory (SST) [4],[5] which explains how emotional, instrumental, and informational support from social networks enhances well-being and buffers individuals against stress by fostering feelings of being valued and protected. It is highly relevant to policing, where officers face chronic stressors such as violence, heavy workloads, and resource constraints, and where support from colleagues, family, and community has been shown to reduce burnout, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. In this study, the theory is used to explain how social support can protect police officers from occupational stress and improve psychological well-being. However, while it effectively accounts for stress reduction, it is less able to explain how support contributes to positive psychological functioning, a gap addressed by the PERMA Model [30] which broadens understanding of well-being through positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.

The PERMA Model, developed by Martin Seligman within positive psychology, conceptualizes well-being as human flourishing rather than merely the absence of mental illness [30]. It comprises five interrelated dimensions: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, which collectively contribute to holistic psychological well-being [15], [16]. In this study, the model provides a multidimensional framework for examining police officers' psychological well-being by considering their positive experiences, involvement in their work, social relationships, sense of purpose, and achievements. However, while the PERMA Model explains the dimensions and outcomes of well-being, it does not fully explain how social support facilitates these outcomes. This limitation is complemented by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which explains how social support may promote well-being by satisfying the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby fostering motivation and psychological health.

SDT, developed by Deci and Ryan, explains how the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, promotes motivation, engagement, and psychological well-being [3], [28]. Autonomy refers to having control over one's actions, competence to feeling capable and effective, and relatedness to experiencing meaningful connection and belonging. The theory proposes that satisfying these needs enhances psychological well-being, whereas their frustration can undermine it [6]. Within policing,

social support from colleagues, supervisors, and family can strengthen these psychological needs by enhancing officers' competence, encouraging autonomy in decision-making, and fostering positive relationships [11], [14]. SDT therefore provides an important explanatory mechanism for understanding how social support contributes to psychological well-being among police officers. Together with Social Support Theory and the

PERMA Model, the three frameworks provide a complementary foundation in which SST explains the nature and role of support, the PERMA Model defines the dimensions of psychological well-being, and SDT explains the psychological processes through which social support may promote well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by a positivist paradigm, emphasizing objectivity, empirical observation, and the use of quantitative evidence to examine the relationship between social support and PWB among police officers. A quantitative correlational research design was adopted because it enabled the study to assess associations between the variables without manipulating them. The study was conducted in Kamukunji Sub-County, Nairobi City County, where the target population comprised 400 police officers distributed across six police stations. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure adequate representation of officers across the stations resulting in 216 respondents.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic items and two standardized instruments. Perceived social support was assessed using the 12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by [38], which measures support from family, friends, and significant others using a seven-point Likert scale. Psychological well-being was measured using the 15 core items of the PERMA-Profiler, developed by [1] covering positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. The instruments had established psychometric properties, while their contextual appropriateness was further assessed through expert review. A pilot study involving 20 police officers from Central Police Station, who were excluded from the main study, was conducted to assess clarity and internal consistency.

Data collection was conducted in person after obtaining the required institutional and research permissions. Participants provided informed consent and completed the questionnaires independently in private settings, with confidentiality and anonymity maintained through participant coding and secure data handling. Data were analysed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participant characteristics and the study variables. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between social support and PWB, while multiple regression and moderated multiple regression analyses were applied to examine predictive relationships and the moderating effects of demographic characteristics, respectively. Ethical principles concerning voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were observed throughout the study.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The study included 216 police officers selected from 6 stations in Kamukunji subcounty. The demographic characteristics analysed included age, gender, rank, and number of years the police officers were in service. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants Distribution by Age

Age	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
18-25 years	27	15.2
26-35 years	41	23.1
36-45 years	57	32.2
46-55 years	43	24.2

56 years and above	9	5
Gender		
Male	119	67.2
Female	58	32.8
Rank		
Constable	56	31.6
Corporal	25	14.1
Sergeant	39	22
Inspector	42	23.7
Other	15	8.5
Years of service		
1-5 years	20	11.9
6-10 years	39	22
11-15 years	54	30.5
16-20 years	43	24.3
21 years and above	21	11.3

The results shown in Table 1, illustrates the demographic profiles of the police officers who participated in the study. The age distribution revealed that 57 participants were aged between 36–45 years, while those in the 46–55-year age group had 43 participants (24.2%). Participants aged 26–35 years comprised 41 participants (23.1%), while those aged 18–25 years accounted for 27 participants (15.2%). Participants aged 56 years and above, were 9 (5.0%). This distribution suggests that the study sample was largely composed of mid-career police officers who are likely to have accumulated substantial professional experience and exposure to occupational demands.

Regarding gender, 119 participants (67.2%) were male, whereas female comprised of 58 participants (32.8%). This indicates that the sample reflects the traditionally male-dominated composition of police services, although female officers also formed a notable proportion of the participants.

In terms of rank, 56 participants (31.6%) were constables, followed by inspectors, with 42 participants (23.7%), and sergeants with 39 participants (22.0%). Corporals constituted 25 participants (14.1%), while participants in other ranks represented 8.5% (15 participants). This implies that the study captured experiences primarily from lower and mid-level ranks within the police service, who constitute the majority of operational personnel.

With respect to years of service, participants who had served between 11–15 years, were 54 participants (30.5%), followed by those with 6–10 years of service, with 39 participants (22.0%). Participants with 1–5 years of service were 20 (11.9%). This finding implies that most participants had moderate to considerable experience in policing, which may influence their perspectives on work-related challenges and psychological well-being.

Generally, the findings show that the participants were diverse in terms of age, gender, rank, and years of service, providing a representative distribution of police officers with varying demographic and professional characteristics.

Levels of Perceived Social Support Rendered to Police Officers

The levels of social support rendered to police officers across four domains: emotional support, approval support, instrumental support, and informational support was investigated. Table 2 presents the results on the levels of perceived social support rendered to police officers.

Table 2: Levels of Perceived Social Support Rendered to Police Officers.

Levels of Social Support	Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	5.1 – 7.0	36	20.3
Moderate	3.1 – 5.0	121	68.4
Low	1.0 – 3.0	20	11.3
Total	1.0 – 7.0	177	100.0

Table 2 presents the levels of perceived social support rendered to police officers. The findings indicate that 68.4% of the participants showed moderate levels of social support, 20.3% of the participants reported high levels of social support and 11.3% reported low levels of social support. These findings suggest that most police officers perceive the social support available to them as moderate, while relatively fewer officers experience either very high or very low levels of support.

Levels of Psychological Well-Being Among Police Officers

Participants rated their agreement with statements determining psychological well-being at work using an adapted PERMA-Profiler, which measures five domains: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Table 3 presents the results of the levels of psychological wellbeing among police officers.

Table 3: PERMA Levels of Overall Psychological Well-Being

Levels of PWB	Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	6.67 – 10.0	42	23.7
Moderate	3.34 – 6.66	128	72.3
Low	0.0 – 3.33	7	3.9
Total	0.0 – 10.0	177	100.0

Table 3 presents the levels of overall psychological well-being among police officers based on the PERMA-Profiler. The findings show that 72.3% of the participants reported moderate levels of psychological well-being, while 23.7 % reported high levels of psychological well-being and 3.9% indicated low levels of psychological wellbeing. These results indicate that most police officers experience a moderate level of overall psychological well-being, while relatively fewer officers report either high or low levels of well-being.

Relationship Between Social Support and Psychological Wellbeing Among Police Officers

Correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing among police officers in Kamukunji Sub County. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis Results

Correlations		Social_ Support	Psychological_ Wellbeing
Social_Support	Pearson Correlation	1	.722**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	177	177
Psychological_Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	.722**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	177	177
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 4 presents the results of the correlation analysis examining the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among police officers. The findings indicate a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between social support and psychological well-being ($r = .722$, $p < .01$, $N = 177$). This shows that higher levels of social support were associated with higher levels of psychological well-being

among the respondents. The correlation coefficient was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicating that the relationship observed between social support and psychological well-being among the police officers was not due to chance.

Moderating Effect of Demographic Characteristics on The Relationship Between Social Support and Psychological Wellbeing Among Police Officers

A moderated multiple regression was conducted to assess whether demographic variables (age, gender, rank, and years of service) moderated the relationship between social support and psychological well-being. The results are presented in tables 5.

Table 5: Moderated Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.158	0.337		0.47	0.639
	Social_Support_Years_of_Service	-0.064	0.058	-0.236	-1.109	0.269
	Social_Support_Age	0.092	0.056	0.329	1.645	0.102
	Social_Support_Gender	0.349	0.077	0.533	4.515	0
	Social_Support_Rank	0.039	0.033	0.13	1.211	0.221
a. Dependent Variable: Psychological_Wellbeing_c						

Table 5 presents the moderated regression coefficients examining whether demographic characteristics moderated the relationship between social support and psychological well-being. Moderation analysis assesses whether the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable changes depending on another variable. The findings indicate that gender significantly moderated the relationship between social support and psychological well-being ($\beta = .533$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the strength of the relationship between social support and psychological well-being varied across male and female officers. However, age ($p = .102$), years of service ($p = .269$), and rank ($p = .221$) were not statistically significant moderators, implying that the relationship between social support and psychological well-being remained consistent across different age groups, job ranks, and years of service. These results demonstrate that among the demographic variables examined, only gender influenced how social support related to psychological well-being.

DISCUSSION

The findings on levels of social support among police officers in Kamukunji Sub-County showed that the majority of officers (68.4%) experienced moderate social support, while 20.3% reported high support and 11.3% reported low support. This pattern is consistent with evidence from India, Brazil, the United States, Canada, and Tanzania, where police and public safety personnel commonly report moderate rather than optimal levels of perceived social support. The findings suggest that although support systems are available, they may not be sufficiently strong or consistent to meet officers' psychosocial needs, particularly given the demanding nature of police work. The presence of a minority reporting low support is noteworthy because inadequate support may increase vulnerability to occupational stress, burnout, and psychological difficulties. The findings are also lower than those reported among consecrated women in Kenya, where higher levels of social support were observed, potentially reflecting differences in occupational demands and organizational environments. From the perspective of Social Support Theory, the predominance of moderate support indicates that emotional, informational, and instrumental resources are available but may not fully buffer occupational stress. The findings therefore underscore the importance of strengthening institutional, peer, and interpersonal support systems within the police service.

The findings regarding levels of psychological well-being among police officers in Kamukunji Sub-County indicated that 72.3% of officers reported moderate psychological well-being, 23.7% reported high well-being, and only 3.9% reported low well-being. Compared with studies from the United States, Australia, Nigeria,

South Africa, Uganda, and other Kenyan contexts, the current study recorded a substantially smaller proportion of officers with low psychological well-being. Nevertheless, the predominance of moderate rather than high well-being suggests that officers may be functioning adequately without necessarily experiencing optimal psychological flourishing. Differences from previous studies may reflect variations in policing environments, institutional support, occupational conditions, sampling procedures, or measurement approaches. The findings can be interpreted through the PERMA model, which conceptualizes well-being in terms of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Moderate well-being may indicate that officers maintain functional relationships, engagement, and a sense of purpose associated with their professional roles, while occupational stress may constrain positive emotions and a stronger sense of accomplishment. Thus, the findings suggest that interventions should move beyond preventing psychological distress toward promoting sustained psychological flourishing.

The findings on the relationship between social support and psychological well-being among police officers demonstrated a strong, positive, and statistically significant association between the two variables ($r = .722$, $p < .01$, $N = 177$). This finding indicates that officers who perceive greater social support tend to report higher psychological well-being. The result is consistent with international and African studies that have generally identified positive relationships between social support and well-being, although the strength of the association in the current study was comparatively greater. The strong relationship may be particularly relevant in policing because officers operate in high-risk environments and frequently depend on teamwork, peer cohesion, and interpersonal relationships to manage occupational demands. The finding provides strong support for Social Support Theory, which emphasizes the role of emotional, informational, and instrumental resources in coping with stress. It also complements the PERMA model by suggesting that social support may enhance positive emotions, relationships, and meaning, thereby contributing to broader psychological functioning. Overall, the evidence indicates that social support represents an important protective and promotive resource for psychological well-being among police officers in Kamukunji Sub-County.

The findings concerning the moderating effect of demographic characteristics on the relationship between social support and psychological well-being showed that gender significantly moderated the relationship ($\beta = .533$, $p < .001$), whereas age ($p = .102$), years of service ($p = .269$), and rank ($p = .221$) did not have statistically significant moderating effects. The significant gender effect is consistent with studies indicating that the way social support translates into psychological outcomes may differ between male and female officers. In contrast, the absence of significant effects for age and years of service differs from research suggesting that career stage and age can influence the benefits derived from social support. Similarly, the non-significant effect of rank suggests that hierarchical position did not substantially alter the association between support and well-being among officers in Kamukunji. These differences may reflect the specific organizational and occupational context of policing in the study area, where shared operational pressures may create similar experiences across age, tenure, and rank categories. The findings therefore suggest that demographic moderators may not operate uniformly across policing environments and that gender-sensitive approaches may be particularly important when designing interventions aimed at strengthening social support and psychological well-being.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that social support among police officers in Kamukunji Sub-County is generally moderate, with most officers reporting moderate levels, a smaller proportion reporting high support, and a notable minority reporting low support. This indicates that while support systems exist within the policing environment, they may not be sufficiently strong or consistent to fully meet officers' psychosocial needs, thereby highlighting the need for strengthened institutional, peer, and interpersonal support structures.

Further, findings showed that psychological well-being among police officers is largely moderate, with a smaller proportion reporting high well-being and very few reporting low well-being. This outcome suggests that most officers are functioning adequately within their work environment, although they may not be experiencing optimal psychological flourishing, pointing to the need for interventions that promote enhanced well-being beyond basic mental health stability.

Additionally, results demonstrated a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between social support and psychological well-being among police officers. This means that officers who perceive higher levels of social support tend to report better psychological well-being, confirming the important role of supportive relationships in enhancing resilience and emotional functioning within the policing context.

Finally, the study established that demographic characteristic partially influence the relationship between social support and psychological well-being. Gender significantly moderated this relationship, while age, years of service, and rank did not show significant moderating effects. These findings highlight the importance of considering gender differences in designing support and well-being interventions, while also suggesting that the benefits of social support are generally consistent across different age groups, ranks, and service durations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that social support is positively associated with psychological well-being among police officers, highlighting the importance of strengthening supportive relationships and mental health resources within the policing environment. In light of these findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance officers' psychological well-being. First, police officers should be encouraged to strengthen their personal and professional support networks by actively seeking emotional, informational, and instrumental support from colleagues, family, and community members. Participation in peer support groups, mentorship programmes, and open communication initiatives can promote emotional expression, mutual understanding, and effective coping with occupational stress.

Secondly, mental health practitioners should develop tailored counselling, stress management, and resilience-building interventions that incorporate social support mechanisms and address gender differences in how support influences psychological well-being. Preventive services such as psychoeducation, peer counselling training, and regular psychological assessments should also be strengthened to promote early identification and management of psychological difficulties among officers. Finally, policymakers within the law enforcement sector should establish institutional policies and programmes that strengthen structured peer support, improve access to mental health services, and foster supportive workplace environments. Gender-sensitive mental health policies, recognition of officers' contributions, work-life balance initiatives, and organizational practices that promote psychological support should be prioritized to improve officers' well-being and overall job performance.

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