Domestic Violence Contributing Factors to Increasing Divorce Rate in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Domestic violence sustains as one of top five major contributing factor for divorce in Malaysia. Although there were various research has been conducted, the actual root cause still remains unclear. The present study aims to address the root cause of the domestic violence in marriage followed by the specific types or sub-categories of domestic violence that lead to divorce. The study also focuses on the direct and indirect influence of domestic violence on current primary reasons of divorce and additionally discusses the importance of awareness about cycle of abuse.

Materials & Methods: Involving purposive and snowball sampling technique, followed by primary and secondary data collection, the study is conducted with 30 participants, which comprised of male, female lawyers and social workers, who work closely with domestic violence related cases. Total 7 questions provided to each participant to answer, through google document online survey.

Result: The grounded theory analysis reveals the top three specific form of abuse that mainly leads to divorce which is physical, psychological, sexual abuse. The root cause of domestic violence is identified as influenced by individual factors followed by environmental factors. A definite possibility is found about current three primary reason of divorce in the country derivation from direct or indirect influence of domestic abuse which can be categorized in post- effects of domestic violence. Finally, awareness about cycle of abuse for engaged couples is emphasized as it works as precaution with potential to reduce the risk related to abuse at early stages.

Conclusion: Overall, the present study reveals various factors and aspects of domestic violence in marriage which contributes to the increasing divorce rate in Malaysia.

Keywords: cycle of abuse; form of abuse; domestic violence; divorce; root cause

INTRODUCTION
In Malaysia, divorce is a process involving legal methods of permanent separation of two individuals who were legally married. In a marital relationship, a men or women choose to end their relationship (divorce) which is a permanent way out from each other's life pathway due to various reason. Although there are multiple reasons for dissolution of marriage in Malaysia, domestic violence has made into top five of the major contributing factors among other factors to increasing divorce rate in the country. Max Tum (June 2022). Domestic violence in marriage is the direct or indirect violence act of a spouse which prevents the other partner to access their needs or rights. This abusive act exercised by the spouse in order to gain power or control over another partner (husband or wife). Physical, psychological, sexual, verbal, financial and emotional abuse are included in domestic violence but not limited. Madeline Chow (2024). In the year 1994, Domestic Violence Act 1994 (DVA) enforced by Malaysian government after addressed domestic violence as a critical public issue. Women's Centre For Change (2020). Past study conducted by Ireeny Muzammel (2022) Telenisa Statistics and Findings 2021, shows communication breakdown was

the most mentioned cause for divorce recorded at 25 percentage and domestic violence took second seat for most common cause for divorce in 2021 at 23 percentage. Other than the first and second, the third most reported reason for divorce in 2021 at 20 percentage, when the spouse (husband) could not provide proper maintenance, shows an increase from 18 percentage in 2020. Lastly, the state of being unfaithful or not being loyal to a spouse or infidelity was the fourth most reported cause at 11 percentage, followed by polygamy which is married to more than one partner at a time by 8 percentage. The study has compared and contrast the four major reasons of divorce from the year 2019 to 2021, but domestic violence remained in the major four recorded reasons for filing a divorce since 2018 according to research. Similarly, another research conducted by Kadir N. A. (September 2021), Malaysia has also recorded domestic violence as one the major reason of marriage breakdown or divorce. In addition, almost 28 percentage cases of domestic violence by male have been recorded as the major cause for divorce; this clearly states the gender role in influencing the marriage breakdown rate in the country as well, Department of Statistics Malaysia, (2020). Besides that, according to an article by Bernama (November 2023), Infidelity, lack of understanding and interference by in-laws were the major reason for divorce among married couples in Malaysia. Rohani Abdul Karim, the board chairmen of National Population and Family Development, announced that 56.2 percentage of men told they had proceeded for a divorce because of lack of understanding from wife, followed by infidelity 11.8 percentage and lastly interference from in-laws 10 percentage. On the other side, women also mentioned the reason of lack of understanding as the major cause of divorce 38 percentage, followed by infidelity 20.5 percentage and lack of responsibility or irresponsibility 15.2 percentage. Other than these major reasons given by women's, there were few other reasons such as interference from in-laws 6 percentage, refuse husband for a second wife 2.8 percentage, critical financial states or issues 4.7 percentage, and other causes, such as infertility, abuse and spouse being involved in crime 10.4 percentage. On the other end, according to article by Ida Lim (23 July 2023), top reason of divorce in 2022 is communication breakdown. Focusing on year 2022 alone, both lack of financial support from husband and domestic violence took the same spot as the second-most common cause for marriage breakdown or divorces at 15 percentage each. Throughout the seven years starting from 2016 to 2022, the major four causes for Muslims' divorce cases were due to the same reason lack of communication or misunderstanding, domestic violence, lack of maintenance payment by husband and infidelity or being unfaithful. It clearly shows, domestic violence has sustained or stayed for a long term in the major causes category of divorce cases in Malaysia. Although communication breakdown took the first place with 31 percentage in year 2022 as in the statistics mentioned in the article, the key factor of communication breakdown possibly derived from the after effect of domestic violence. According to Health direct (September 2022), one of the common sign and symptoms shown by the domestic violence victim is losing their confidence and interest and more quiet or isolated than usual. Unfortunately, there is no research has been conducted to identify the root cause of communication breakdown in marriage which leads to divorce in Malaysia. No scientific or statistical data evidence that indicates communication breakdown solely present in between couples who seek divorce, without the influence of domestic violence in their marriage. Moreover, only one of the sections in research which has been done by Ireeny Muzammel (2022) Telenisa Statistics and Findings 2021, indicates on the specific types of domestic violence that leads to divorce in Malaysia. Limited data availability about the specific type's domestic violence that directly or indirectly leads to marriage breakdown. Thus, the lack of understanding about direct root cause of specific types of domestic violence which leads to divorce and the lack of study about indirect cause of domestic violence which leads to primary reason of divorce in Malaysia, could be possible reason of sustaining domestic violence reasoned divorce cases in the country still exist for a long term. An article by Esther Landau & Nor Ain Mohamed Radhi (2019), mentioned short or bad temper and failure to control or manage them well, were the main reason of domestic violence in Malaysia. Hannah Yeoh, Minister of Deputy Women, Family and Community Development, said 71 cases of bad-tempered domestic violence were recorded this year involving major number of women as victims, meanwhile 14 involved men. Adding up to the previous statement, lack of understanding and misinterpretation over most issues was the second biggest factor that contributed to domestic violence, with a number of 48 cases involving women victims. The research also identified drug addiction as the third major factor, with a number of 43 cases involving women and 1 for men. Based on the observation, she agreed most of the

victims choose to stay quiet to save their marriage and protect their children's. This article best reveals that, most affected gender in Malaysia by domestic violence is women, and most of them choose to stay quiet without exposing the issue, which explains many unreported cases could be possibly exist all over Malaysia.In Malaysia, although there are multiple research or studies have been conducted through surveys and interviews regarding increasing trend of divorce rate, but the actual root cause and primary reason connections still remains unclear. Most of the studies such as research by Ireeny Muzammel (2022) Telenisa Statistics and Findings 2021, reveal that the primary reasons for divorce in Malaysia is due to communication breakdown, domestic violence, financial negligence or husband not providing maintenance, and these primary reasons shuffle places in the circle of top 3 followed by infidelity. Unfortunately, there is no research has been conducted to identify the root cause of those primary reason which leads to divorce in Malaysia. No scientific or statistical data evidence that indicates communication breakdown solely present in between couples who seek divorce, without the influence of domestic violence in their marriage. Not only communication breakdown, but other reasons such as husband not providing maintenance and infidelity observed from past article by Ida Lim (23 July 2023) as the reason of divorce, is not proven to be solely caused by the reasons itself. All the primary reasons, could be influenced or derived as the after effect of domestic violence, since domestic violence itself can be divided into 5 specific types which has it is own specific impact on the victims, but there is no past research study has been conducted to further explore these possible derived connections of current primary reasons. Since domestic violence has 5 main specific sub-categories, it is essential to explore the cycle of abuse in marital relationship and understand each and every one specific type of domestic violence which commonly leads to divorce. Besides this, although article by New Straits Times (October 2024), reveals current root cause of domestic violence (physical violence) which is bad temper management, but the overall root cause of domestic violence in marital relationship still remains unclear as study by Firdaus Abdul Gani (2020), revealed there are multiple factors is associated with the domestic violence issue and the major two influencing factors, is environmental and individual factors. Thus, current research has been conducted to fill the gaps in the knowledge and to explore about domestic violence and it is contributing factors in increasing trend of divorce rate in Malaysia. According to Carla S.S (May 2005), early research and studies about domestic violence, encourage a better understanding of the nature of perpetration, the cycle and phase of violence or abuse, and the effect of domestic violence on family and society in long term. This understanding is the first step of awareness and encourages the self-discipline (groomed behaviour or correcting the existing behaviour issues) or government invention or implementation of proper safety measures, counselling and campaign for each individual in marital relationship or who were about to get married in Malaysia. Domestic violence cases, could be reduced and prevented, if such research conducted to address in detail causes and phases of the issue. Current study majorly benefits but not limited to, human rights activist, social worker, policy maker, and people who concern about violence act and more. The findings of this study, do not only address the domestic violence factors related to increasing divorce, but could also contribute to prevent and control the domestic violence and also helpful to mold individual characteristic and lift the harmony in the society or in the country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current study is conducted in explorative and descriptive design. Qualitative methodology has been applied to perform the research, which allows the research to be carried out in explorative aspect and provides in detail insights of real-world issues related to the current topic of the study. Tenny S, Brannan JM, Brannan GD. (2022) Qualitative Study. The descriptive research design, applied purposive and snowball sampling technique, is carried out to obtain answers for the research questions through multimethod involving primary and secondary data collection such as observation, field research and online google survey consists of developed research questions. State of Selangor has been chosen as the desired site of study for the current research since higher domestic violence cases has been recorded in the particular state followed by fairly higher number of divorce cases. The collected data, has been analysed using grounded theory where it contributes to analyse and identify the patterns in the data, which generate theory, Success Team (2023).Since there is no concrete rule about the number of participants in which qualitative research study

involves, most researchers estimate the number of participants or respondents between 10 to 50 people should be good enough or sufficient depending on the developed research questions and also the type of the research which it focused about, Creswell & Creswell (2018). Besides that, an article by Peep Laja (2024) states, the standard number of respondents require in qualitative research is about 12 to 13 people. While some researchers argue about the exact number of respondents needed for qualitative research, but most individuals in scientific field have agreed it is below 20 respondents which is good enough to attain the state of data saturation during data analysis in qualitative research. The state of data saturation in research is referred as the state where the researcher has study and analyse everything as possible from the obtained data and could not find anything further, Burmeister & Aitken (2012).Thus, to maintain validity of data, a total number of 30 personnels comprising lawyers and social workers in Selangor, are chosen to participate in the study. Each participant is filtered according to certain criteria which is applicable for the research study as, years of experience, number of domestic violence cases and divorce cases attended, before participation. Each Online google survey document comprised of 7 relevant questions, which contributes to short time length of answering not exceeding 20 minutes per survey session. This time length encourages the personnels to participate and answer the questions on point, without taking up much time in their busy schedule. The first part of the survey document contains consent form for participation where it states a detailed information about the research purpose and requires participant to read and understand before proceeding to answering research questions. It was made sure; respondents willingly participate in the research without any force or influence. Keeping in consideration, about ethical views, the ethical approval has been obtained from the institute and the participant personal information is not obtained, besides the survey questions answers where the respondents answers is only used for this research study data analysis and publication.

RESULTS

Table 1. shows grounded theory analysis for survey questions

Survey Questions	Developed Theory Based on Grounded Theory Analysis of Received Responses
Question 1: Which gender is most affected by domestic violence in a marital relationship?	Gender victimization, where female is the most affected gender by domestic violence in marital relationships.
Question 2: What is the root cause of domestic Violence in marriage?	The root cause of domestic violence in marital relationships is influenced by individual factors such as psychological, power, substance abuse, sexual, economical and also environmental factors such as family, social, cultural practice.
Question 3: Which specific type of domestic Violence commonly leads to divorce among married couples?	The specific forms of abuse in domestic violence that leads to divorce is, physical, psychological, sexual, financial and social

Question 4: Does domestic violence cause: *Communication breakdown* *Financial negligence towards victim* *Cheat the victim (Infidelity)*	Communication breakdown, financial negligence and infidelity towards the victim which is the current primary reasons for divorce, could be derived from spousal abuse which can be categorized in post- effects of domestic violence
Question 5: What is the common time duration, usually victims choose to stay with the abuser and why?	The time length and the reasons that makes the victim to stay in abusive relationship varies by individual behaviour and social stigma which is the outcome of personality type and personality traits
Question 6: Does this time duration chosen by the victim, influenced by any factor below: *fear of perpetrator, personal character, family background, religion, age, education, society.*	The time duration a victim chooses to stay in the abusive relationship, which is the decision-making ability, is majorly influenced by personality, experience, education, and environment.
Question 7: In your opinion, is it possible to overcome domestic violence in marital relationship cases in early stages, by providing awareness about the cycle of abuse to the couples before marriage as early precautions?	Awareness about the cycle of abuse may work as an early-stage precaution for an individual to identify the abuse in marriage at early stages, but it may not contribute to decrease the occurrence of domestic violence in marriage

The raw primary data collected to support the study's analysis and findings is available to view in the corresponding author's Google Drive.
Data Document Link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1caUisPOmM449G5c6RGox8j5KgZsL1pHEuX44GmsOM18/edit?pli=1#responses
Due to ethical considerations, respondents' personal details are kept anonymous, and only responses are made available to view in the form of charts and short answers.

DISCUSSION
According to the present study results, it has been established that domestic violence in marital relationships is the major factor contributing to the increasing divorce rate in Malaysia due to various direct and indirect influences of abuse. The results obtained reveal the presence of gender victimization in marital relationships where the most commonly affected gender by domestic violence in a marital relationship is women. This gender victimization has been possible due to certain factors such as the physical strength difference in between genders, fearful nature of female towards crimes where it makes them to be submissive rather than defensive in violent environment and socio-cultural norm that has been followed for generations in the society, where gender male always considered superior to the female. Besides that, the present findings also reveal that the root cause of domestic violence in marital relationships is mostly influenced or caused by individual factors such as psychological, power, substance abuse, sexual, and economic. Environmental factors such as family, social, and cultural practices are also considered as the root cause of domestic violence in marital relationships based on the analysis.
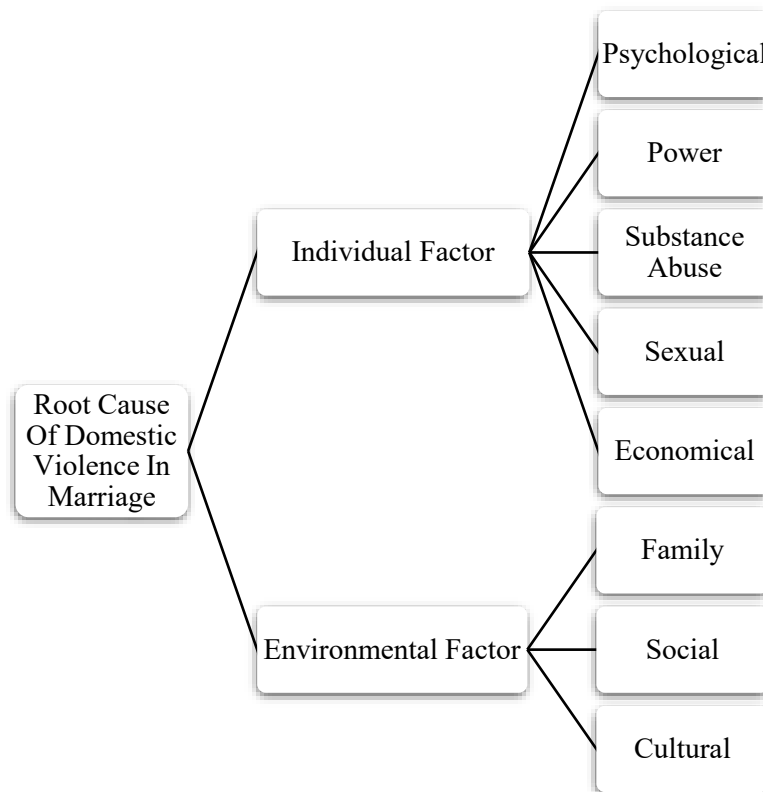
Figure 1. shows categories and sub-categories of root cause of domestic violence in marriage

On the other end, a few specific forms of abuse in domestic violence, such as physical, psychological, sexual, financial, and social, have been identified as the common types of abuse that lead to divorce in marital relationships. Although five forms of specific abuse have been identified as the common form of abuse that leads to divorce among married couples, but present study data finding shows there are top three specific form of abuse that mainly leads to divorce as the first top is physical abuse, second top is psychological abuse and third top is sexual abuse.
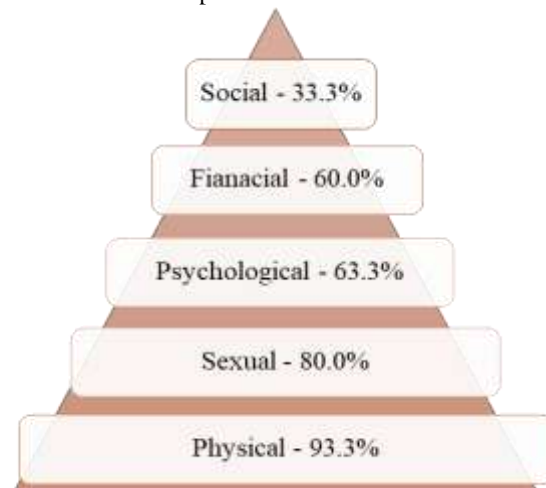

Figure 2. shows the percentage ranking based on the participants answers for the types of domestic violence that lead to divorce

Meanwhile, identifying the specific forms of abuse is considered important in the study, equal importance is given to addressing the time duration and reason the victim chooses to stay in the abusive marital relationship. Based on the results, the time length and reasons that make the victim to stay in the abusive relationship vary by individual behaviour and social stigma, which is the outcome of personality type and personality traits. An individual's behaviour is majorly influenced by the mental health, genetics, and personality of the person, whereas social stigma is something that takes place when a group of people such

as family, friends, co-workers and more, pass on negative comments, thoughts or beliefs on other individuals. Personality type and trait have the capability of influencing an individual's decision-making ability, abuse coping mechanism, and vulnerability of an individual more likely to be a victim. A person with high neuroticism, tend to exhibit more vulnerability to become a victim due to the nature of neuroticism personality comprised of negative emotions, anxiety, constant worries, can be easily hurt, continuous feeling of guilt and shame, frequent mood swings, frequent self-doubt, poor emotional balance, and more, which is a plus for the perpetrator, where they can be abused and controlled easily.
The further part of the study indicates the time duration victim chooses to stay in the abusive relationship, which is related to the decision-making ability, majorly influenced not only by personality but also influenced by experience, education, and environmental factors. The factors influencing the decision-making ability of the victim such as personality factor, which refers to fear of the perpetrator and personal character; the experience factor, which refers to family background and age; the environmental factor, which refers to religion and society; finally, education factor refers to the education level of the victim. Thus, results about the victim's personality and decision-making abilities reveal that the victim itself can be a contributing factor of domestic violence occurrence in a marital relationship.
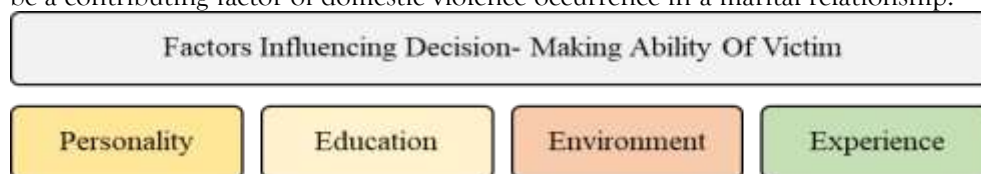

Figure 3. shows the factors influencing victims decision-making ability

Coming up to the analysis of the direct and indirect influence of domestic violence on current three primary reason of divorce in the country, such as communication breakdown, financial negligence and infidelity towards victim, could be derived from spousal abuse which can be categorized in post- effects of domestic violence. The results reveal a theory that there is a higher possibility that the current primary reason for divorce among Malaysian couples could be due to the after-effect of domestic violence, where the root cause leads to the primary reason, which went unnoticed. Since domestic violence is addressed as the major reason of divorce among married couples in the country, the present study emphasizes on the importance of the awareness about the cycle of abuse in domestic violence. Almost all the participants have similar opinions on the importance of awareness about the cycle of abuse to the engaged couples as a precaution that helps to overcome domestic violence in early stages.
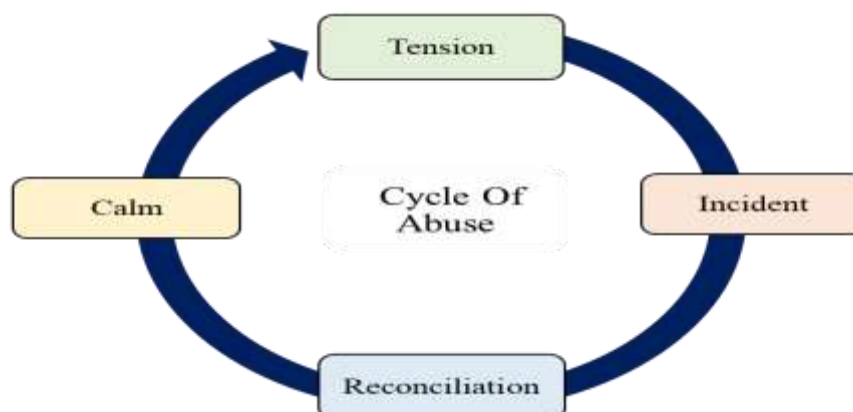

Figure 4. shows the stages in the cycle of abuse that commonly takes place in domestic violence
Domestic violence in marital relationships has various forms, including physical, psychological, sexual, financial, and social violence. Lenore Walker's 1979 book "The Battered Woman" introduces the abuse cycle, which shows a pattern of behaviour used by perpetrators through humiliation and fear. The cycle consists of four phases: "Tension," "Incident," "Reconciliation," and "Calm," which help explain why victims struggle to leave.
Based on the results, it can be concluded that awareness about the cycle of abuse is necessary for engaged couples as it works as a precaution, which is important to be addressed since it has the potential to reduce the risk related to abuse, although it does not work as a preventive measure.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the present study reveals various factors and aspects of domestic violence in marital relationships that contribute to the increasing divorce rate in Malaysia through primary data collection and comparison with readily available secondary data sources. Based on the results, analysis and discussion, the study better explains about domestic violence in marital relationship in various aspects such as the most affected gender, root cause, specific types of abuse that leads to divorce, time duration followed by reason victim stay in abusive environment, influences in victim decision-making ability, direct and indirect influence of domestic violence on current primary reasons of divorce in the country, and the importance of awareness about cycle of abuse as precaution. The present study findings also could be helpful for certain community professionals where it contributes to fill the gap in the knowledge furthering much better understanding about domestic violence in marital relationship which sustains in the top primary reason of divorce in the country for a very long term.

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APPENDIX

Participation Inform Consent Form:

Dear Participants,

You are invited to participate in the research study about domestic violence contributing factors to increasing divorce rate in Malaysia. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have all the rights to choose whether or not to participate in this research study.

Purpose and Procedures of The Study To study and gain better understanding about domestic violence as the primary contributing factors to increasing divorce rate in Malaysia. The data and information gathered from this study, contributes for awareness and further understanding about domestic violence as the primary contributing factors to increasing divorce rate in Malaysia. The data collection is performed through online survey with social workers, and lawyers who work closely with these domestic violence cases in Malaysia, particularly in Selangor.

Your information will be kept anonymous and results will be published for academic purpose only. If you need further information about the research study, please allow yourself to contact the researcher through email at nashray0210@gmail.com.
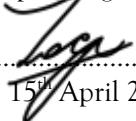Consent:
I have read and understood all the information provided in this consent form and I voluntarily agreed to participate in this research study about domestic violence contributing factors to increasing divorce rate in Malaysia.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Manuscript Tittle: Domestic Violence Contributing Factors To Increasing Divorce Rate In Malaysia
I'm the corresponding author (Turgeswary Sivannason) , certify that I have **NO** affiliation or involvement in an organization or entity with a financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Corresponding Author Signature,

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Date: 15ᵗʰ April 2025