



Client strategies for PrEP use among female sex workers in four provinces in South Africa: A cross sectional study

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OPTIONS is a 5-year USAID funded technical assistance grant aimed to provide targeted support to expedite and sustain access to ARV-based HIV prevention products in countries and among populations where most needed.

BACKGROUND

The South African National Department of Health (NDoH) introduced oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a daily antiretroviral pill taken to help prevent HIV, in June 2016 as part of a phased approach for rollout of oral PrEP to populations most at risk of HIV infection, such as sex workers, men who have sex with men and adolescent girls and young women.

Adherence to PrEP is key to its effectiveness; however, little is known about effective strategies to help clients continue to use PrEP in South Africa as literature commonly focuses on adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART) or TB treatment. Understanding the clients’ strategies used to adhere daily to PrEP among female sex workers in South Africa can inform interventions for effective use of PrEP.



METHODS

We conducted a survey and follow-up in-depth interviews (IDIs) with current, past, and never users of PrEP in South Africa from September 2017 through January 2018. Data were collected at eight purposively selected mobile or fixed clinic sites in rural, peri-urban and urban areas with varied PrEP uptake in four provinces. Six of the eight facilities were providing services to female sex workers (FSWs) (referred to as sex worker sites) and two to MSM (referred to as MSM sites).

This poster is a sub-analysis of FSWs who were currently seeking services at the seven sites.

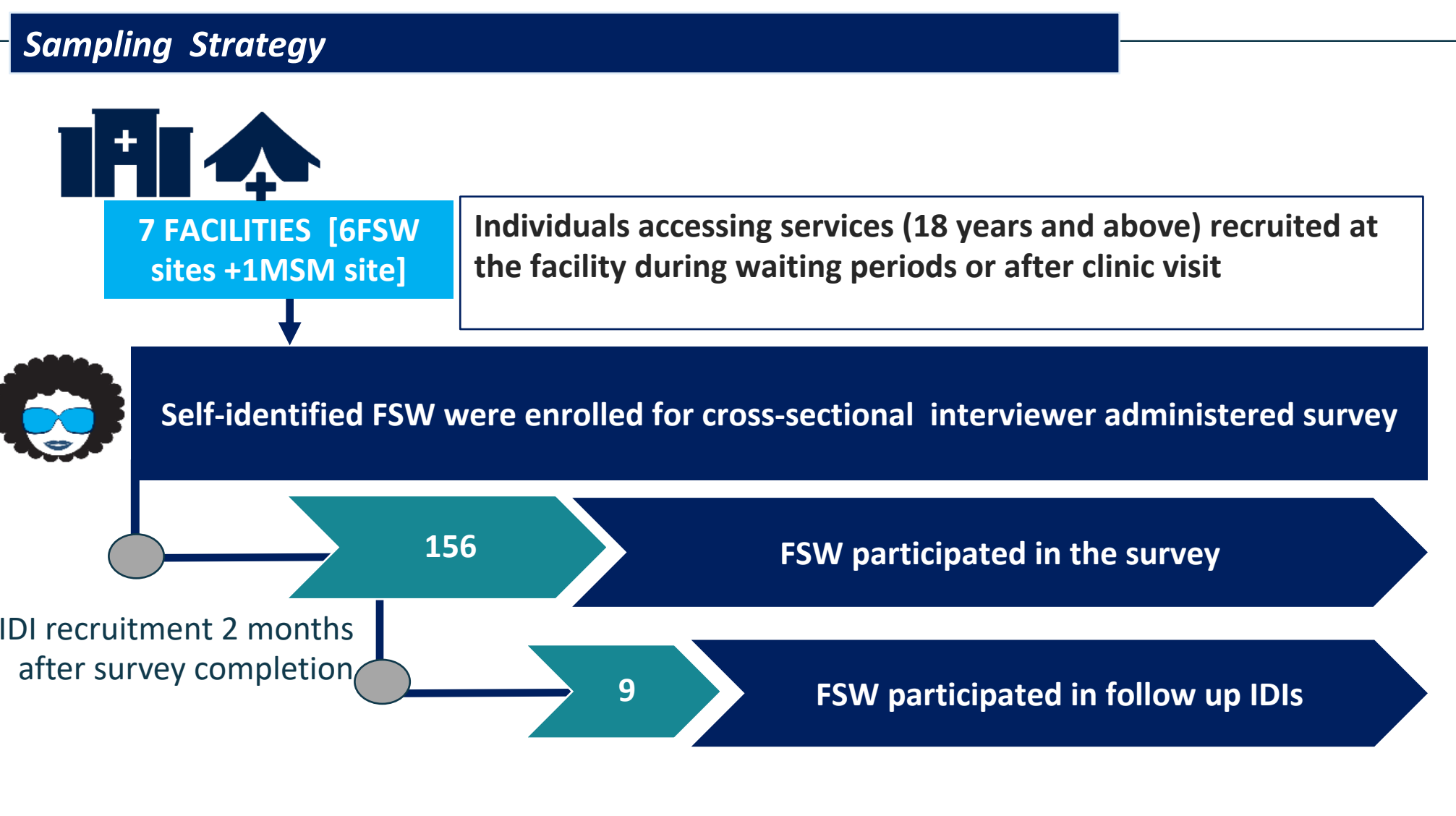


Figure 1: Methods used to select participants for the survey and IDIs

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the survey data. An applied thematic content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data using NVivo 12.

RESULTS

Demographics

We asked participants, "Do you identify as a FSW, male sex worker, MSM, non or other," and 156 individuals self-identified as female sex workers. Participants’ demographics are described in Figure 2.

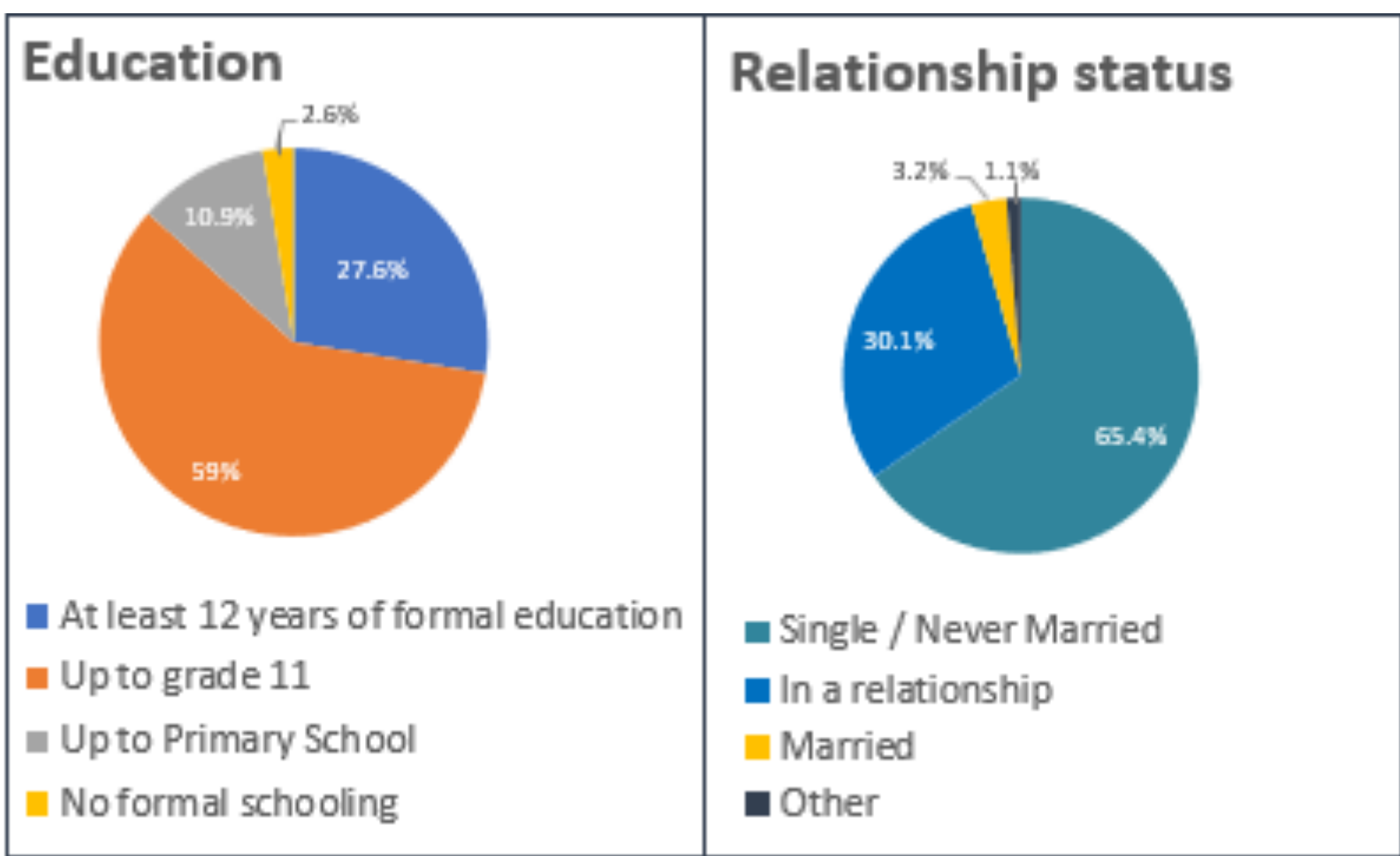


Figure 2: Demographics of FSW participants who participated in the survey

Survey and IDI Results

During the survey, we asked current PrEP users, "Is there anyone/anything that regularly reminds you to take your oral PrEP on time?"

Out of the FSWs who were currently using PrEP (n=58), over half (n=32, 56%) used something to remind them to take their pill while the remainder replying to this question (n=25, 44%) did not use anything. Six FSWs who were currently using PrEP participated in the IDIs.

"Who or what reminds you to take your oral PrEP on time?" (n=32)

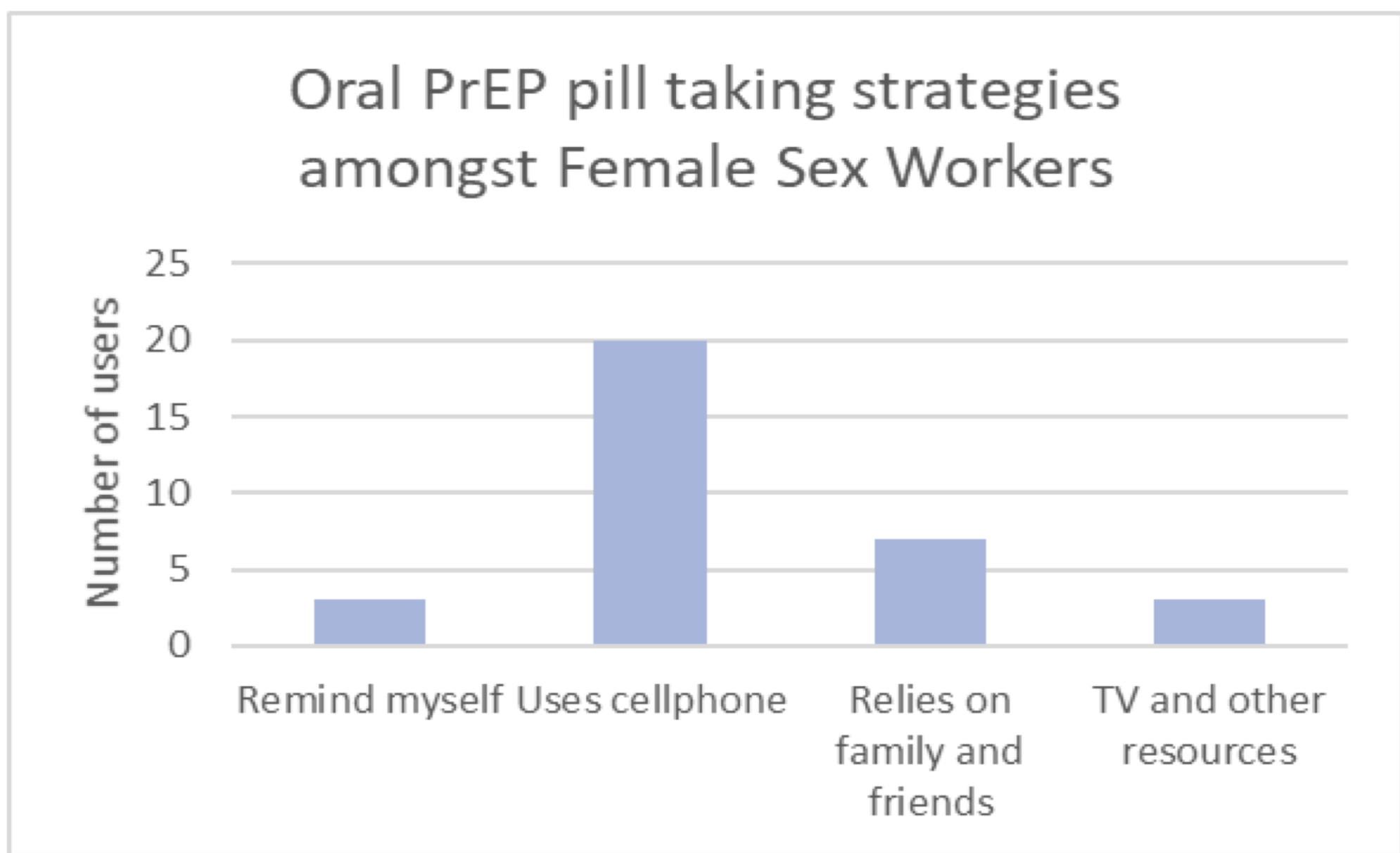


Figure 3: Sex worker's oral PrEP pill taking strategies

RESULTS

In the IDIs, participants described practices and habits related to daily PrEP adherence. Some described that they take PrEP at a particular time, most often in the evenings. One current PrEP user described how she used a daily TV show to remind her of the time to take PrEP. Others similarly described taking PrEP in the evenings or after breakfast.

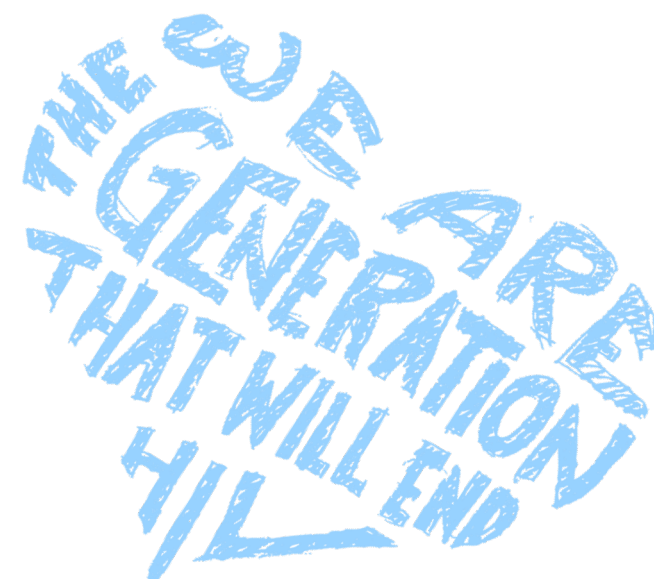
Other strategies that participants used to help them adhere to treatment included taking PrEP at a convenient time or at the same time every day setting an alarm or reminder on their phone, and taking PrEP along with other medications or incorporating it into their daily routines.

"What worked for me was setting an alarm to remind me. I generally take my pills in the morning after breakfast, I don't exactly have a set time. I know if I am at work, I have my tea at 8 so around 8:30 I take my pills. Even when I am not at work, I wake up before 8." [20 year old, current PrEP user]

"Yes, she knows. Her support (mother) is encouraging me to keep taking my treatment e.g.: when Skeem Saam plays on TV I know it's my "alarm" because she'll phone me wherever I am and remind me. My child as well, during the last advert in Skeem Saam around 18:55 she'll put a glass of water next to me and ask where I put my tablets and fetches them for me to drink." [30 year old, current PrEP user]

CONCLUSIONS

PrEP adherence was facilitated by social support from family and friends, phone reminders, and incorporating pill taking into existing routines. The majority of the female sex workers either used cell-phone reminders or relied on family and friends. Service providers can suggest some of these strategies to PrEP clients when counselling on adherence. However, there is need for more research on how effective these strategies are on daily pill taking.



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