

## **PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON STREET BEGGING IN AWKA METROPOLIS, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This paper assesses public perception on street begging in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of this study involves adult residents of the area within aged 18 years and above at the period of this study. A sample of 204 respondents was selected through the purposive convenient/availability and accidental sampling techniques. The structured questionnaire and in-depth interview (IDI) were used to collect the data for the study. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software was used to code and process the quantitative data; while the IDI was analyzed using theme-based method of content analysis. Simple frequency count and percentage was used to analyze the quantitative data, while the study hypotheses were tested with chi-square inferential statistics. The findings of the study revealed among other things that street begging was high in Awka metropolis and the members of the public considered it as very bad for the urban socio-economic development. Based on the findings obtained through the study, it was recommended that government should improve the educational infrastructures by introducing measures to ensure that all children of educational ages are included in the compulsory education system and that education is provided virtually free of charge, as it will help to a large extent to keep child beggars off the street.

**Keywords:** Street begging, Public Perception, Metropolis, Socio-economic & development

## **Introduction**

Street begging has become one of the urban social problems that have not been given proper attention especially in developing nations like Nigeria. The problem of street begging is however not exclusively affecting third world nations or Africa per se, rather, a worldwide issue. In larger cities in South and Central America, begging is an issue on the agenda of both local and central authorities which attempt to reduce its prevalence through urban planning initiatives which has continues to prove fruitless; while in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, the issue of street begging is equally prevalent, where most beggars are indigenous people, especially women and children (Merikangas, He, Burstein, Swanson, Avenevoli, Cui & Swendsen, 2010). In Mexico City, children are largely involved in street begging (Ribadu & Mahmoud, 2010).

Although, the problem of begging is recognized as a worldwide phenomenon, it is more pronounced in the third world (Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009). This is true of Nigeria where different categories of beggars are conspicuously found in motor parks, religious worship, flyovers, markets, road junctions, venue of ceremonies among other public places, begging for alms (Jelili, 2010). They are present everywhere within the cities of Nigeria especially in Awka metropolis, with their unkempt hair, dirty faces, blistered lips, tainted teeth, crusty skin, stinking bags and bare feet; armed with plastic bowls, decorated with shabby attires and congregated into small groups. In most cases and scenario, a young child is seen leading a blind older man or woman who clutch onto the other end of a long stick going from vehicle to vehicle, individual to individual while chanting the same lines and over accosting members of the public with alluring songs and soliciting alms.

Street begging refers to a situation whereby individuals patrol the streets to beg for alms which often is in monetary form. Street begging is believed to be carried out by the homeless, physically challenged and poor people mostly in Northern Nigeria, although it has gradually become a general phenomenon that almost every state in Nigeria is battling with. It is reported that an average 65% of beggars flock into Lagos to beg every year (Adedibu, 1989). Abuja the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) has also been battling with the menace. In Awka, the capital city of Anambra State, beggars are seen in almost all the strategic places of the city; in the flyover, in the market places and even in the church premises. The more worrisome issue about street begging is the number of able-bodied beggars in the streets. Among this group of able-bodied beggars are the vocational or professional beggars who believe that they will earn more begging than they would in a regular job. They have made begging into an art form. They have very well made stories, some written on placards, which make it difficult for one to resist making a donation. Some of these able-bodied persons are seen leading the blind, pushing the lame in wheelchairs or using children to beg (Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009).

However, the cities of nations are expected to be a place of sanity, tourism, aesthetics and glamour. Unfortunately, the many cities in the Nigerian context have fallen below these expectations and one of the factors that constitute a drawback to the sustainable growth of cities in Nigeria is that of street begging. In developed nations, vulnerable people or individuals with disabilities are kept in the welfare agencies where they are cared for, rather than leaving them to beg on the streets. However, the Nigerian situation is rather awkward. Those with disabilities are treated with neglect and as non-entities; in most traditional communities, most disabled people are regarded as cursed and are abandoned to suffer their curse. They resort to begging as means to survive the harsh situations they find themselves (Ribadu, & Mahmoud, 2010).

Also, the problem has arrested the attention of governments at various levels to formulate policy measures to control it, but unfortunately despite these efforts, the problem of street begging continues unabated in Nigerian cities especially in Awka metropolis. Begging of any form is an eyesore to urban development; sometimes street beggars become nuisance to tourists and present a shameful image for the Nigerian socio-economic system (Dawodu, Osahon & Emifoniye, 2003). Many nations worldwide including some states in Nigeria had some forms of legislations to curb the menace of street begging; however, in Awka metropolis which is the area of this present study, there seem to be no legislation regarding the prevalence of street begging; thereby giving all categories of beggars the freedom to move freely and unrestricted within every nook and crony of the city soliciting for alms (Nwosu, 1994). Hence, it is feared that such practice will continue unabatedly if actions are not taken to control it.

Irrespective of whatever reasons for the continuous flow of street begging, the way to which people evaluate and respond to the trend, character and socio-economic conditions of street beggars and the implications of street begging becomes important in the analysis of street begging and this has not been established within the academic literature especially within the context of Awka urban. Perception studies help researchers to understand the variations in the opinions and attitudes of people toward socio-economic, cultural, religious and political events within societies, which could help in policy formulation. Therefore, this study is positioned to investigate the public perception of street begging in Awka metropolis, Anambra State.

It is therefore envisaged that a study of this kind will pave a way on solutions to the menace. Also because there is little or no data on the public perception of street begging especially with regards to Awka metropolis. To this effect, this study is positioned to examine public perception of street begging in Awka metropolis anchored on the following objectives:

- i. To evaluate how the residents in Awka metropolis perceive the trend of street begging in Awka metropolis.

- ii. To examine the socio-economic consequences of street begging in Awka metropolis.
- iii. To proffer possible remedies to the trend of street begging in Awka metropolis.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do the residents in Awka metropolis perceive the trend of street begging in Awka metropolis?
2. What are the socio-economic consequences of street begging in Awka metropolis?
3. What are the possible remedies to the trend of street begging in Awka metropolis?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The vicious circle of poverty theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory was chosen because it helps to underscore how poverty plays an important role in increasing the problems of street begging. According to the theory, the poor are trapped in the situation with little chance of escaping such that in a vicious process, poverty is maintained among the poor across the generations. Therefore, in order for the poor to meet their basic needs, they have to resort into begging. Many people especially the physically challenged and less privileged in Nigeria are faced with situations where they cannot fend for themselves due to their conditions; as a result they resort to begging as a means to survive.

### **Materials and Methods**

The cross-sectional survey method of research was adopted for this study. The area for this study was Awka metropolis which is located in Awka South L.G.A of Anambra state. Awka Metropolis has presence of visible social amenities such as hospitals, religious worship centres, market places, commercial banks, universities and other educational parastatals where beggars are seen every day. The Population of Awka South L.G.A according to the 2006 national census is 189,049 with a male and female population of 97,815 and 91,234 respectively (United Nations Human Settlements Programme UN-HABITAT, 2009). However, the target populations for this study are individuals within the ages of 18years and above who are resident in Awka South L.G.A of Anambra State. The population ratio of adults between the 18years and above in Anambra state according to National Population Commission, Anambra State cited in Chukwuemeka and Chukwujindu, 2013) is 47.1% of the entire population of a given area. Thus, 47.1% of the entire population of Awka Metropolis (i.e., adults between 18years and above) put this study at the population of 89,042. The sample size for this study is 204. In determining the sample size, the researcher used Alien Taro Yamane (1967) method of sample size

determination. This study used the combination of purposive, convenience/availability and accidental sampling techniques altogether. Thus, using this method, the researcher first purposively chose locations where the study participants were easily assessable including market places, motor parks, churches and recreational centres. Thereafter, the convenient/availability and accidental sampling techniques were applied to select the respondents who were administered the questionnaire copies.

The major instrument of data collection for this study was the questionnaire which is a quantitative instrument for data collection. For the purpose of triangulation, the In-Depth Interview (IDI) was adopted for the qualitative data collection. This served as complementary tool to the quantitative instrument of data collection for this study. The questionnaire was self-administered by the researcher and two research assistants. The qualitative instrument (IDI) was conducted by the researcher and one female research assistant at a time schedule and at the leisure of the sampled interviews. Permission was sought from the selected interviewee to allow the use of tape recording in recording their responses. Field notes were also taken to capture other relevant information. The researcher moderated the interview sessions while the research assistant took notes arising from the interviews. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to process the quantitative data collected while the simple descriptive statistics which includes frequency counts and simple percentages were used to analyse the data. The data were also presented in tables and graphical illustrations to give clearer picture of the data analysed. The study hypotheses were tested using the Chi-Square inferential statistics ( $X^2$ ). Furthermore, the qualitative data generated through In-Depth Interview (IDI) were analysed using the method of content analysis. The qualitative data were used to complement the quantitative data.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

In this study, 204 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the sampled respondents. However, only 192 copies (representing 94.1% of the questionnaire copies) were duly completed and returned to the researcher, while 12 copies (representing 5.9% of the questionnaire copies) were not returned. Thus, the analysis is based on the 192 returned questionnaire copies.

**Table 1:***Composite Table Containing the Analysis of Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

<b>Gender</b>		
Male	120	62.4
Female	72	37.6
Total	192	100.0
<b>Age Categories</b>		
18 – 27 Years	25	13.0
28 – 37 Years	54	28.1
38 – 47 Years	64	33.3
48 – 57 Years	32	16.7
58 – 67 Years	17	8.9
Total	192	100.0
<b>Religious Affiliation</b>		
Christianity	153	79.7
Islam	16	8.3
Traditional	23	12.0
Total	192	100.0
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
No Formal Education	9	4.7
First School Leaving Certificate	14	7.3
SSCE/WAEC/GCE	34	17.7
OND/NCE	57	29.7
B.Sc/HND	71	37.0
M.Sc/PhD	7	3.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100.0</b>

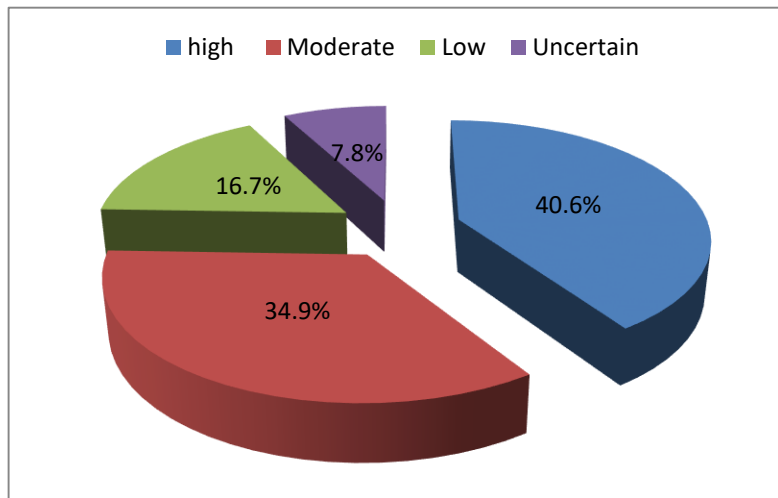
***Field Survey, 2019***

Table 1 shows that a majority (62.4%) of male respondents participated in this study, while a lower proportion (37.6%) of them were females. The data also show that a majority (33.3%) of the respondents aged between 38-47 years, with mean age of 38.4; while the least age category in the sample is 8.9% of them who aged between 58-67 years. A majority (79.7%) of the respondents was Christians and those within the traditional religion comprised of 12.0% of the population; while those who were Moslems comprised of 8.3% of the samples. The data also show that a majority (37.0%) of the respondents attended up to

the tertiary level of education with B.Sc/HND certificates. This is followed by 29.7% of them who obtained OND/NCE certificates, while 17.7% of them obtained SSCE/WAEC/GCE certificates. This data suggest that a majority of the residents in Awka metropolis are learned enough to read and write in order to provide information contained in the questionnaire.

### Section B: Analysis of Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** How do the residents in Awka metropolis perceive the trend of street begging?



**Fig. 1:** Respondents' ratings about the trend of street begging in Awka Metropolis.

Figure 1 shows that a majority (40.6%) of the respondents rated street begging in Awka metropolis as 'high'. This is followed by 34.9% of them who rated it as 'moderate'. A lower proportion (16.7%) of them rated it as 'low', while 7.8% of them were uncertain about it. This finding implies that the residents of Awka metropolis perceived street begging as being on the high rate in Awka metropolis. The respondents were asked to indicate the locations where they mostly see street beggars. Findings to this are shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Respondents Views on Places where Street Beggars are Mostly Seen**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Market places	58	30.2
Religious worship centres	30	15.6
Commercial places	38	19.8
Everywhere	46	24.0
Others	20	10.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Field Survey, 2019*

Data contained in table 2 show that a majority (30.2%) of the respondents indicated that street beggars are mostly seen in market places in Awka metropolis. This is followed by 24.0% of them who indicated that they are mostly seen everywhere. 19.8% of them however indicated that they are mostly seen in commercial places; while 15.6% of them indicated that street beggars are mostly seen in religious worship centres. Other places as indicated by 10.4% of the respondents include: flyovers, recreational centres and motor parks.

**Table 3: Respondents' Perception about street Begging**

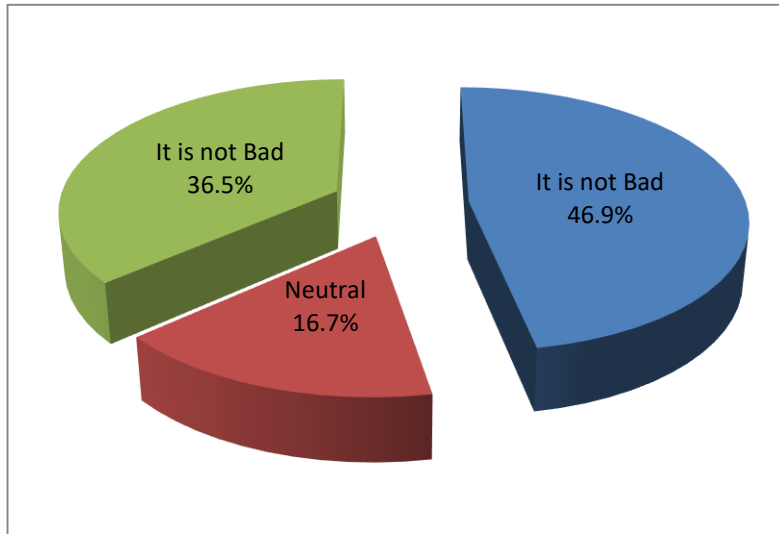
Statements	Negative Perception	Neutral	Positive Perception	Total
The constitute public nuisance	105 (54.7%)	24 (12.5%)	63 (32.8%)	192 (100.0%)
They need to be assisted	67 (34.9%)	39 (20.3%)	86 (44.8%)	192 (100.0%)
They need to be chased out of public places	93 (48.4%)	48 (25.0%)	51 (26.6%)	192 (100.0%)
Most of them are thieves	82 (42.7%)	43 (22.4%)	67 (34.9%)	192 (100.0%)
Most of them are cursed	74 (38.5%)	25 (13.0%)	93 (48.4%)	192 (100.0%)
They are elements of underdevelopment	102 (53.1%)	23 (12.0%)	67 (34.9%)	192 (100.0%)
They are just victims of circumstance	64 (33.3%)	18 (9.4%)	110 (57.3%)	192 (100.0%)

*Field Survey, 2019*

Data contained in table 3 shows that among the items given, a majority of the respondents agreed in some items about the features of street beggars in Awka and equally disagreed in some other items. The items they were in agreement include the view that: street beggars constitute public nuisance, need to be chased out of public places, most of them are thieves, they are elements of underdevelopment. On the other hand, items which they disagreed upon include the view that: they need to be assisted, most of them are cursed, and they are



victims of circumstances. The respondents were further asked to express their views on their general perception about street begging in Awka metropolis. The findings to this are contained in figure 2.



**Fig. 2:** General Views of the Respondents on Street Begging in Awka Metropolis.

The data in figure 2 shows that a majority (46.9%) of the respondents had negative perception about street begging in Awka metropolis. About a quarter (36.5%) of them however felt nothing bad about street begging, while a lower proportion (16.7%) of them were neutral on the issue. From the qualitative data, an interviewee said,

Although most street beggars are somewhat justifiable especially those who suffer one physical disability or the other, so many of them are just lazy and greedy. In fact, I don't just assist any type of beggar that comes my way; rather I evaluate their conditions to know which one that is justifiable. Because, of our religious values, people are often touched to helped beggars, and because of this single factor, many able-bodied persons who could work to contribute significantly to the economy see street begging as an occupational role to enrich themselves. So I totally condemn street begging of any form (Male, 47 Years, Civil Servant, Awka Metropolis).

Another interviewee had this to say,

Street beggars in Awka town are really growing unlike before. Perhaps this may be associated with high level of poverty in the country. People are merely responding to their social realities. However it is, street beggars constitute serious impediment to

urban development, because they are not adding anything to the economy; rather, they remain unproductive (Female, Civil Servant, Awka Metropolis).

However, another interviewee had a contrary view about street beggars by saying,

I don't see anything bad about street beggars in actual sense. I help them within my capacity because I consider them people that are rather unfortunate. So if I see a way of helping them, I do it wholeheartedly. Even the bible said we should help the needy. They are the needy in our society today. It is not their fault, and neither is it that they love begging but most of them beg because of poor conditions of living (Female, 47 Years Trader, Awka Metropolis).

**Research Question 2:** What are the socio-economic consequences of street begging in Awka metropolis?

**Table 4** Respondents Views about the Socio-Economic Consequences of Street Begging in Awka Metropolis.

Statements	VeryTrue/ True	Uncertain	False/Very False	Total	Ran k Ord er
Most children involved in street begging eventually become thieves.	94 (49.0%)	36 (18.8%)	62 (32.3%)	192 (100.0%)	5 <sup>th</sup>
Street beggars have the risk of contacting dangerous diseases which they can infect to the general public	102 (53.1%)	27 (14.1%)	63 (32.8%)	192 (100.0%)	4 <sup>th</sup>
Street beggars are liability to the government and members of the public	152 (79.2%)	15 (7.8%)	25 (13.0%)	192 (100.0%)	1 <sup>st</sup>
Street beggars constitute environmental nuisance	124 (64.6%)	24 (12.5%)	44 (22.9%)	192 (100.0%)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Street beggars have the potentials to become social deviants	76 (39.6%)	56 (29.2%)	60 (31.3%)	192 (100.0%)	6 <sup>th</sup>
Able-bodied street beggars constitute human resource wastage	104 (54.2%)	35 (18.2%)	53 (27.6%)	192 (100.0%)	3 <sup>rd</sup>

**Field Survey, 2019**

The statements contained in table 6 were used to gather data on the perceived socio-economic consequences of street begging in Awka metropolis. The respondent rated the given statements on 5-point Likert-type options ranging from very true to very false. The very true/true options signify agreement on the statements, while the false/very false options signify disagreement on the statements. Consequently, item by item analysis shows that all the items were agreed upon by a majority of the respondents, as consequences of street begging

in Awka metropolis. However, the rank order statistics was run to determine the relative importance of the factors as socio-economic consequences of street begging. Consequently, the first consequence of street begging in the rank order is that they are liabilities to the government and the society in general. Secondly, a majority of the respondents perceived that street beggars constitute nuisance to the social environment. Thirdly in the rank order, a majority of the respondents also perceived that able bodied street beggars constitute human resource wastage. Other consequences are shown in the rank order rows in table 6. In addition to these support these data, an interviewee opined that,

The fact is that there can never be a sustainable urban development without eliminating issues such as street begging. In most developed nations, street begging is prohibited because it is an obstacle to sustainable urban development. Street beggars especially those who are suffering from one disease or the other, should be taken care of, through the establishment of destitute homes and other social welfare centres (Male, Social Welfare Officer, Awka Metropolis).

**Research Question 3:** What are the possible remedies to the problem of street begging in Awka metropolis?

**Table 5:** Respondents' Views on the Possible Remedies to Street Begging in Awka Metropolis

Options	Frequency	Percent
Establishment of destitute centres	72	37.5
Payment of allowances to disabled persons	16	8.3
Strengthening of social welfare agencies across the state	25	13.0
Forcing beggars out of the streets	10	5.2
Arresting anyone found begging on the public streets	13	6.8
Establishment of financial assistance programmes for the less privileged in the state	56	29.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Field Survey, 2019*

As contained in table 7, a majority (37.5%) of the respondents perceived that establishment of destitute centres is most likely to quell the issue of street begging in Awka metropolis. This is followed by 29.2% of them who perceived that arresting anyone found begging on the public streets, is most likely to control the street begging in Awka. Also, 13.0% of the respondents felt that strengthening of social welfare agencies will help to curtail the problem of street begging in Awka metropolis. In support of these data, an interviewee noted that,

The government has a lot of responsibility when it comes to controlling the issue of street begging in our cities. First a majority of those street beggars are physically challenged or those who are less privileged in the society. The government can play a crucial role in this direction by initiating social welfare programmes for the less privileged such as building homes for the less privileged with basic needs supplied to them. This would help to reduce their odds of coming to streets for alms begging (Female, 48 Years, Social Welfare Officer, Awka Metropolis).

Another interviewee had it that,

...families and religious agencies are the first point of call when it comes to the less privileged in the society. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that we should help the needy and the poor in the society and the more we reach out to these people, the more we receive our divine blessings. So what I am saying is that religious institutions should continue to preach about the need to help the poor within communities. If family members can strive to take care of their less privileged ones, I don't see the reason why they should be on the streets for begging (Male, 55 Years, Religious Priest, Awka Metropolis).

Based on the data analysed in this study, the summary of findings in line with the research objectives are highlighted as follows:

1. The study found that street begging in Awka metropolis is a prevalent phenomenon. The members of the public perceived that street beggars are seen in virtually all public places including: market places, commercial places, religious worship centres among other places.
2. The members of the public however perceived that street beggars constitute public nuisance, need to be evacuated from the public places, and are elements of urban underdevelopment, among others. In general, the majority of residents in Awka metropolis expressed a negative perception about street beggars in Awka metropolis.
3. Due to the view that a majority of the members of the public perceived street begging as a social problem, they also indicated that some of the socio-economic consequences of street begging include: being liability to the government and members of the public; constituting nuisance to the social environment, and constituting human resource wastage especially for able bodied street beggars.

## **Conclusion**

This study was conducted in view of the researcher's desire to provide policy direction towards curbing the trend of street begging, which is yet to be acknowledged by the government as an urban social problem. Considering the

fact that street begging continues to grow unabated, it means that street beggars are making a living through it, and the members of the public are those who still offer them financial as well as other aids. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine public perception about the trend of street begging in Awka metropolis. Based on various quantitative and qualitative data analyzed, the researcher concludes that members of the public have negative views about street begging in Awka metropolis; although there are some individual who consider nothing wrong with the issue. This study therefore provides policy direction to address the growing trend of street begging in Awka metropolis.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, conclusion and areas of gap in this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Government should improve the educational infrastructure by introducing measures to ensure that all children of relevant ages are included in the compulsory education and that education is provided virtually free of charge. This will help to a larger extent, to keep child beggars off the street.
2. For the physically challenged beggars, government should build rehabilitation homes where such categories of persons could be sent and managed. Such will curtail the degree of street begging to a plausible height.
3. There is also a need to initiate policies that will prohibit all forms of street begging in Awka metropolis. This should be done in a manner that would ensure that the human rights of such persons affected are not violated.
4. The government through Local government and ward authorities should identify needy or extremely poor categories of individuals in the society and make available to them, the basic needs of life which would curtail them from going to the streets or other public places to beg.
5. There is also the need to religious agencies to teach families and communities on their roles in catering for poor and less privileged members of their communities, so that they would not go out to the streets bagging for alms.

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