

Adolescents in Drug Abuse in Sumbawa Regency: A Legal Sociological Review of Weak Social Control and Legal Awareness

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Abstract

Drug abuse among adolescents in Sumbawa Regency has shown a significant increase in recent years, with a growing number of rehabilitated users coming from the 13–18 age group. This phenomenon is not merely a legal violation but also a social symptom arising from weakened social control and low legal awareness. This study aims to analyze the social factors that contribute to adolescents' vulnerability to drug abuse, focusing on the roles of family, school, peer environment, and the local legal culture. Using qualitative content analysis of online news, institutional reports, and local media publications, this research integrates three major theoretical frameworks: social control theory, differential association theory, and concept of legal consciousness. The findings indicate that the weakening of adolescents' social bonds with family and school is a key factor that creates space for deviant behavior. Interactions within peer networks serve as a medium for learning and normalizing drug use. Furthermore, low legal awareness leads adolescents to underestimate the legal and moral consequences of their actions, rendering formal law ineffective as a mechanism of social control. Study concludes that drug abuse among adolescents in Sumbawa is socio-cultural problem that requires a multidimensional response, including strengthening family and school-based social control.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of drug abuse among adolescents is a social problem that has become increasingly prominent in Sumbawa Regency in recent years. This region, known for its religious community and strong traditional social values, is now facing serious challenges related to the increasing involvement of young people in drug use. Based on data from the Sumbawa Regency National Narcotics Agency (BNNK), in the first semester of 2024, 32 drug users were recorded as being rehabilitated, and surprisingly, 18 of them were teenagers under 18 years old, and there was even one case of a user under 15 years old. Most of them are still students. This data is supported by a report by Suarantb.com (January 25, 2025), which stated that of the 78 drug users rehabilitated throughout 2024, 32 were students, and 7 of them were under 15 years old. Meanwhile, until September 2025, Kabarsumbawa.com (October 7, 2025) reported that 92 drug users were rehabilitated by the Sumbawa BNNK, of which 37 were students, and 16 were under 15 years old. These facts indicate a worrying trend, where the age of drug users is getting younger, and indicate the existence of structural vulnerabilities in the social system, especially at the family and school levels.

This phenomenon indicates significant social change at the micro level. The Sumbawa community, long known for its adherence to religious and traditional values, has apparently been unable to fully withstand the rapid penetration of modern culture and a free-flowing lifestyle that has emerged through various channels, including social media. Drugs are no longer a problem only in large cities like Mataram, but have spread to smaller and rural areas. In this context, adolescents are the most vulnerable social group, as they are in a phase of identity-searching, where curiosity and peer influence are particularly strong. This situation aligns with Travis Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control, which states that deviant behavior emerges when social bonds between individuals and society weaken. In the case of Sumbawa, these bonds appear to be weakening at both the family and educational levels, two key agents of socialization in shaping individuals' moral and legal awareness.

On the family side, many adolescents use drugs without being detected early. Several reports, such as those published by Regional.kompas.com (June 27, 2024), indicate that some adolescents come to rehabilitation centers on their own initiative or after their condition has become severe, indicating that family oversight of their children's behavior remains weak. In the context of legal sociology, this weak family function can be understood as a failure of informal social control in preventing legal violations. Families, which should serve as the first line of defense in fostering legal consciousness, no longer effectively carry out their educational and supervisory functions. Many parents are busy working or fail to recognize the early signs of their children's involvement in drug abuse. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of modern sociological research, which shows that industrialization and economic mobility lead to a deficit in emotional supervision within families, ultimately creating opportunities for the emergence of deviant behavior.

In addition to family factors, schools also play a crucial role in social control. However, cases of drug abuse among students in Sumbawa demonstrate that educational institutions have not yet optimally implemented their moral control function. According to a report by Suarantb.com (2025), the majority of students undergoing rehabilitation were from junior high and senior high schools. Some had even used drugs in their school environment. This indicates that formal education's role as a vehicle for developing values and legal awareness is not functioning optimally. In some schools, counseling on the dangers of drugs remains ceremonial and does not address aspects of student behavior change. However, from a sociological perspective, educational institutions are crucial agents in the process of socializing legal values. According to Émile Durkheim, schools not only transfer knowledge but also instill norms and social solidarity. When this role weakens, a value vacuum emerges that can be filled by negative environmental influences.

Adolescents' social environments are also a significant factor contributing to the rise in drug abuse. Several media reports, such as Samawarea.com (June 2024), assert that many adolescents are drawn into drug abuse due to peer influence. This "follow-the-line" phenomenon demonstrates the dual function of social networks: on the one hand, they provide a space for healthy social interaction, but on the other, they can also serve as a channel for the spread of deviant behavior. In this context, Edwin Sutherland's (1947) theory of associative differentiation is relevant in explaining how deviant behavior is learned through social interaction. Adolescents do not suddenly become drug users; rather, they learn from their social environment how to obtain, use, and even conceal this behavior from social scrutiny. With increasingly open access through social media and online networks, the spread of information about drugs has become more rapid and difficult to control. This reinforces the view that drug abuse is not only an individual problem but also a social phenomenon produced through social interaction and weak normative control.

From a sociological legal perspective, the increasing involvement of adolescents in drug abuse in Sumbawa reflects a gap between the formal legal system and informal social structures. While the legal system has established strict regulations against drug abuse through Law Number 35 of 2009 concerning Narcotics, legal awareness among the public—especially among young people—remains low. In many cases, adolescents do not fully understand the legal consequences of drug abuse. They are more influenced by social factors such as peer solidarity, group pressure, or curiosity. Soerjono Soekanto emphasized that the effectiveness of the law is determined not only by the content of the norms but also by the legal culture of the society that supports them. In the Sumbawa context, legal culture among adolescents appears to be weak, primarily because they are more subject to social values formed within their friendship communities and the digital world than to formal legal norms.

Easy access to drugs is a serious problem that exacerbates the situation. The Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) has stated on numerous occasions that drug trafficking has now penetrated rural areas, with increasingly sophisticated distribution patterns. Drug sales via social media, instant messaging apps, or peer-to-peer intermediaries make it difficult for law enforcement to prevent them. This demonstrates a form of social disorganization within local communities, where social norms that have maintained order are starting to lose their effectiveness. When informal social control (from family, school, and religious leaders) weakens, and formal control (law enforcement) is limited by the reach of technology, adolescents' social space becomes wide open to negative influences.

This situation certainly has implications for the social future of the Sumbawa community. Teenagers who fall into drug abuse not only suffer physical and psychological damage but also lose their social potential to contribute to their communities. Furthermore, drug abuse among students can have a domino effect: declining academic performance, increasing juvenile delinquency, and diminishing social trust in educational institutions. If left unchecked, this situation has the potential to produce a generation of young people who lack direction and values and weaken the moral fabric of society.

This issue also demands reflection on the social responsibility of religious institutions and local communities in Sumbawa. In a society with a strong religious foundation, the weak role of religion in shaping legal awareness is a major question. Religious leaders and missionary institutions play a crucial role in internalizing moral values, which serve as informal social control. However, the reality on the ground shows that moral messages are often not effectively conveyed to the younger generation living in a digital ecosystem. The challenge here is how to reintegrate traditional social values into the context of fast-paced modernity.

From the description of this phenomenon, several important research questions emerge. First, how does the weakness of social control from families and schools affect the prevention of drug abuse among adolescents in Sumbawa Regency? Second, to what extent do friendship networks and social environments facilitate access to and normalization of drug use among students? Third, what is the level of legal awareness among adolescents regarding the legal consequences of drug abuse, and what factors influence its formation? These questions form the basis for a sociological study of law to understand the relationship between social norms, legal awareness, and deviant behavior among adolescents.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) describe the profile of adolescent drug users in Sumbawa based on secondary data available online; (2) analyze the weakness of non-formal social control, especially in families and schools, on adolescent behavior; (3) explore the role of social networks in facilitating the spread of drugs; and (4) assess the level of legal awareness of adolescents regarding drug abuse. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of the sociology of law, as well as

practical contributions to the formulation of social and educational policies at the local level.

The problem of drug abuse among adolescents in Sumbawa cannot be viewed solely as a violation of the law, but rather as a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon. It involves social structures, legal culture, and the dynamics of relationships between individuals in modern society. A sociological approach to law offers a broader perspective for understanding that law enforcement is not merely a matter of repression, but also a matter of reconstructing values, awareness, and social solidarity in a changing society.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses an empirical sociology of law approach, which emphasizes understanding law as a social phenomenon that exists within society (Soekanto, 1986; Rahardjo, 2009). This approach is relevant to analyzing the phenomenon of drug abuse among adolescents in Sumbawa Regency because the problem is not only related to legal violations, but also to weak social control, low legal awareness, and social interactions that influence adolescent behavior. From a sociology of law perspective, law is understood not only as written norms, but also as a system of values and social behavior that interacts with the structure of society (Cotterrell, 1992).

The type of data used in this study is online secondary data, obtained from various reliable sources such as official reports from the Sumbawa Regency National Narcotics Agency (BNNK), publications from the Sumbawa Regency Central Statistics Agency (BPS), and local online media outlets that actively report on social issues in the Sumbawa region. Data from the Sumbawa BNNK will be used to examine trends in drug abuse cases, particularly those involving adolescents, including reports of rehabilitation of minors. Meanwhile, data from the Sumbawa BPS provides demographic context, such as the number of school-age residents, education level, and social variables that influence the potential involvement of adolescents in drug abuse (BPS Sumbawa Regency, 2024).

In addition to statistical data, local online media served as an important source for this research. Websites such as Samawarea.com, SumbawaNews.com, LensaNTB.com, and KabarNTB.com frequently report cases of students and teenagers involved in drug abuse, both as users and couriers. These reports also highlight the role of peer groups, weak parental supervision, and the responses of schools and law enforcement. Using media data from 2023–2025, this study seeks to capture the current social dynamics related to drug abuse among young people.

The primary legal reference is Law Number 35 of 2009 concerning Narcotics, which regulates sanctions for abusers and rehabilitation policies for users, including minors. This law serves as a normative basis for assessing the effectiveness of legal policies and law enforcement at the local level, as well as how their implementation reflects public legal awareness of the dangers of narcotics (Ministry of Law and Human Rights, 2009).

The analysis technique used was qualitative content analysis. This approach allowed researchers to read, code, and interpret news narratives and reports based on social and legal themes. The analysis process was carried out by identifying key themes such as weak social control within families and schools, drug access through friendship networks, and adolescents' legal awareness of the dangers of drugs. Through this stage, descriptive data were transformed into conceptual information that could explain the relationship between social phenomena and the prevailing legal system (Krippendorff, 2018).

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation techniques, comparing and confirming findings from various data sources, such as BNNK reports, online media reports, and BPS statistical data. This triangulation aims to avoid information bias while strengthening the credibility of the analysis (Denzin, 1978). Thus, the research

findings are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how weak social control and low legal awareness among adolescents contribute to the rise in drug abuse cases in Sumbawa Regency.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Patterns of Drug Abuse Cases among Adolescents in Sumbawa

Online data analysis indicates that drug abuse among adolescents in Sumbawa Regency reflects an increasingly worrying pattern in terms of age, drug type, and location of cases. According to a report by Kabar Sumbawa (2025), as of September 2025, the Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) had rehabilitated 92 drug users; 37 of whom were students. Of these dozens of students, 16 were under 15 years old, and the rest were in the 15-25 age range, statistically reflecting the dominant age group of adolescents in these cases. The type of drug most commonly used by these adolescent users was methamphetamine, which accounted for approximately 85 percent of all reported student rehabilitation cases. Geographical location also indicates a concentration of cases in several sub-districts, with Sumbawa Sub-district contributing the highest number (21 people), followed by Moyo Hilir (15 people), Plampang (11 people), and Alas Barat (8 people) in the 2025 data (Kabar Sumbawa, 2025).

Other relevant data from Suara NTB (2025) shows that throughout 2024, 78 drug abusers underwent rehabilitation treatment at the Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK), 32 of whom were students. Within this group of students, 7 were under 15 years old. This demonstrates not only the high number of cases, but also that the age of users is getting younger. Junior high and high school students dominate this category, with the majority of cases involving methamphetamine use (Suara NTB, 2025). The reports also noted that the rehabilitation process is often initiated by adolescents on their own initiative, or brought in by family, and that some users are initially hesitant due to stigma or the assumption that rehabilitation will lead to legal proceedings (Kompas, 2024).

This increasing trend in the rehabilitation of minors indicates several important social and legal implications. First, there is growing public awareness, particularly among families and victims, of the need to utilize rehabilitation services—despite persistent barriers such as stigma and fear of legal consequences. Kompas (2024) notes that rehabilitation services provided by the National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) are free and do not charge fees, in an effort to reduce these barriers. Second, the dominant type of drug—methamphetamine—indicates a strong penetration of the synthetic narcotics market in the region. This complicates law enforcement and prevention efforts because the targets for distribution and consumption are highly dispersed and not always formally visible. Third, the regional variation in cases (with concentrations in certain sub-districts) indicates that access and exposure to drugs are not uniform; some sub-districts are more vulnerable, perhaps due to geographic, economic, or stronger social networks.

Legally, the process of handling adolescents undergoing rehabilitation appears inconsistent with the theoretical ideals of social control and legal awareness. Although Law No. 35 of 2009 regulates rehabilitation and protection for drug users, including minors, in reality, many adolescents are initially reluctant to report themselves or participate in rehabilitation due to concerns that their participation will have criminal implications (Kompas, 2024). This indicates that despite the existence of formal legal norms, the internalization of legal awareness in society is still not optimal — adolescents and families still have perceptions of fear or shame, which hinder social control, especially informal social control from family and school.

3.2. Weaknesses of Non-Formal Social Control

One important factor explaining the increasing involvement of adolescents in drug abuse in Sumbawa Regency is the weakening of non-formal social control mechanisms, particularly those originating from families, schools, and religious institutions. Data from the Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) shows that the majority of adolescents rehabilitated in 2024–2025 came from families that did not optimally carry out their supervisory function (Kabarsumbawa.com, 2025). In many cases, families only realized their children were using drugs after behavioral changes appeared, such as frequent isolation, laziness at school, and loss of interest in social activities. This indicates a weak early detection within families of signs of deviant behavior in children. From a sociological perspective, the family, as the primary agent of social control, fails to foster legal and moral awareness early on, leading adolescents to seek social compensation outside the home, including within peer groups that could potentially become a means of drug distribution.

Schools, as the second social agent after the family, also appear less responsive to signs of deviance among students. According to a report by Suara NTB (2025), the Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) highlighted the weak role of schools in detecting and providing early intervention to students suspected of drug use. Many educational institutions lack counseling-based prevention programs, and most teachers have not received training to recognize the characteristics of drug users among students. In the context of Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control, students' weak attachment and involvement with their schools reduces the effectiveness of non-formal social control in the educational environment. Schools no longer function as a forum for internalizing legal and moral values, but tend to become neutral spaces where deviant behavior can hide behind academic formalities.

In addition to families and schools, religious and local communities also experience dysfunction in instilling moral and legal values. According to a report by Lensa NTB (2024), several community and religious leaders in Sumbawa expressed concern that adolescent religious activities have declined in recent years. Many adolescents are more active online and on social media than participating in religious or social activities in their communities. This weakens the social function of religious institutions as a moral control mechanism. However, in the context of Sumbawa society, which is steeped in Islamic values and a culture of cooperation, weak religious-based moral oversight can widen the gap between social norms and adolescents' actual behavior.

From a legal sociology perspective, the above symptoms reflect a shift in social structure that has caused law to lose its social basis in everyday life (Rahardjo, 2009). Families, schools, and religion—which should be the guardians of substantive legal values—are experiencing functional erosion amidst the onslaught of digital culture, lifestyle changes, and economic pressures. When informal social control systems weaken, formal social controls (such as the police and criminal law) are forced to take over the role that should be socially fulfilled. This situation explains why many drug abuse cases are only revealed after arrests or raids, rather than due to social intervention from families or schools. Thus, weak informal social control is a determining factor in the reproduction of deviant behavior among Sumbawa youth.

3.3. Drug Accessibility and the Role of Friendship Networks

One important dimension explaining the rise in drug abuse among Sumbawa youth is the role of friendship networks and easy access to narcotics. Online news searches

indicate that most adolescent drug users learn about these illicit substances through peers, not through professional dealer networks. According to a report by Samawarea.com (2025), the Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) confirmed that almost all students undergoing rehabilitation admitted to first trying drugs while hanging out with friends outside of school hours. Unsupervised hanging out, especially in public areas such as city parks or coffee shops, provides a social space where interactions and information about drugs can occur. This underscores the importance of friendship as a social bridge in the spread of deviant behavior among adolescents.

This phenomenon is relevant to Edwin H. Sutherland's (1947) theory of differential association, which explains that deviant behavior is learned through social interactions with others. In the context of Sumbawa adolescents, drug use does not emerge spontaneously, but rather is the result of a social learning process—where the values, techniques, and justifications for drug use are learned and internalized through peer groups. Adolescents who interact more frequently with drug users are more likely to imitate this behavior than those in drug-free social environments. Intensive interaction in small groups such as "hangout gangs" strengthens the conformity mechanism toward deviant behavior, especially when the group provides social legitimacy such as "solidarity" or "just try it, you'll know what it's like."

In addition to direct friendships, easy access to drugs is also enhanced by the use of social media as a communication and distribution channel. According to a report by Kabar NTB (2025), the Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) noted a shift in drug transaction patterns, which are now often conducted through social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. This network utilizes closed and anonymous communication, expanding adolescents' access to these illicit goods without the need for direct interaction with dealers in the real world. This suggests that drug accessibility is no longer limited to physical spaces but has shifted to the digital realm, where traditional social controls such as parental supervision and school supervision are becoming increasingly ineffective.

From a sociological perspective, the changing patterns of drug access through friendships and social media signal the emergence of a new form of legal dysfunction and social control. Formal law has not fully adapted to these digital social dynamics, while informal oversight mechanisms are losing their effectiveness. Families and schools, which should be the first line of defense, are lagging behind in understanding the new communication patterns of young people. As a result, the law loses its preventive power, and law enforcement tends to be reactive, only taking action after a violation has occurred. In the context of Parsons' (1951) social theory, this phenomenon illustrates a disruption in the social system that causes an imbalance between the functions of social integration and normative control, thus opening up space for deviant behavior to develop among adolescents.

It can be concluded that the increasing involvement of adolescents in drug abuse in Sumbawa is not only triggered by weak non-formal social control, but also by the strengthening of alternative social networks—both through peer groups and digital spaces—which actually function as "deviant learning mechanisms." This poses a major challenge for social-based prevention efforts, as it requires intervention not only at the legal level, but also in the realm of social relationships that shape adolescents' daily behavior.

3.4. Legal Awareness of Youth

A review of news narratives and online reports indicates that many young drug users in Sumbawa lack a clear understanding of the legal sanctions that can be imposed

for drug abuse. For example, a Samawarea.com report (2024) stated that some young people are reluctant to report for rehabilitation due to "public concerns that reporting for rehabilitation will result in legal proceedings," even though the National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) emphasized that rehabilitation services are free and will not result in criminal proceedings. This suggests that despite clear legal regulations, young people's understanding of these legal norms remains weak—that is, they are unsure whether they will be punished if they report themselves.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the lens of Soerjono Soekanto's theory of legal awareness, which states that legal awareness consists of four indicators: legal knowledge, legal understanding, attitudes toward the law, and legal behavior patterns (Soekanto, 1982). In the context of adolescent drug users, the indicator of legal knowledge appears weak because they know that drugs are prohibited, but do not understand the types of sanctions or the difference between users and dealers. The indicator of legal understanding is also low: legal values have not been fully internalized, so that despite prohibitions and threats of criminal penalties, adolescents still see drugs as something to try or "okay once in a while." Their attitude toward the law is ambivalent—between fear and "recklessness"—depending on the social situation, peer pressure, or curiosity. Finally, in the indicator of legal behavior patterns, many adolescents continue to violate legal norms despite knowing the rules, because internalization of the law is not yet strong.

Thus, weak legal awareness serves as a loophole that allows formal law to lose its moral force in the daily lives of adolescents. Although Law No. 35 of 2009 requires rehabilitation and the threat of criminal penalties for drug offenders, these legal values are not embedded in the minds and attitudes of adolescents. They tend to prioritize peer norms or alternative social norms (e.g., hangout groups). From a legal sociology perspective, this indicates that formal control (state law) and informal social control (family, school) have not succeeded in forming an effective legal culture among the younger generation in Sumbawa.

3.5. Sociological Analysis of Law

From a sociological legal perspective, the findings of this study demonstrate that positive law, particularly Law Number 35 of 2009 concerning Narcotics, has not yet functioned optimally as a means of social control among Sumbawa youth. This is due to the lack of internalization of legal values in the consciousness of young people. According to Talcott Parsons (1951), a social system can only function stably if the norms and values contained within it are accepted and internalized by individuals as part of pattern maintenance within the social system. In this context, the law is not only tasked with regulating behavior through sanctions, but must also be able to instill social values that bind community behavior (Parsons, 1951).

The reality in Sumbawa shows that narcotics law norms are more often understood formally—namely, as a criminal threat—rather than as moral values that protect social life. As a result, the law becomes an instrument of repression, rather than a driver of normative awareness. In line with Soerjono Soekanto's (1982) thinking, the effectiveness of the law is measured not only by the existence of regulations, but also by the extent to which the law "lives" in society (living law). In the case of adolescent drug users, formal law is unable to become living law because there is a gap between legal norms and the values that develop in adolescents' social environment, such as peer group solidarity and a culture of permissiveness towards deviant behavioral experiments.

Therefore, a balance between repressive and preventive approaches is necessary. Repressive approaches are important for maintaining order and providing a deterrent effect, but they must be balanced with preventive measures in the form of legal and social education that instills moral and legal values from school age. This approach aligns with Satjipto Rahardjo's (2009) idea of progressive law, which emphasizes that the law must side with humanity and function to awaken moral awareness in society, rather than simply intimidate with sanctions. In the Sumbawa context, strengthening legal education in schools, youth community activities, and the role of the family are more effective social strategies for building a healthy legal culture in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that drug abuse among adolescents in Sumbawa Regency is a complex social phenomenon, not only involving violations of the law, but also reflecting a weak social control system and low legal awareness. Data from the Sumbawa National Narcotics Agency (BNNK) and local media reports show that some drug users who are rehabilitated are still under 18 years old, with some cases even under 15 years old. This fact confirms that formal law has not effectively functioned as a social control mechanism that exists at the community level.

From a sociological perspective, weak non-formal social controls, such as those within families, schools, and religious institutions, contribute significantly to the high risk of deviance among adolescents. Families that ignore children's social patterns and schools that are unresponsive to signs of deviant behavior contribute to a suboptimal legal socialization process. Meanwhile, religious and community values, which should serve as moral bulwarks, are actually showing signs of dysfunction.

Analysis based on social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) shows that adolescents' social ties to social institutions weaken, making them more vulnerable to deviant behaviors such as drug abuse. Conversely, differential association theory (Sutherland, 1947) explains how interactions within friendship networks become a primary medium for the spread and normalization of drug use. Lack of supervision from family and school makes the social environment vulnerable to negative influences.

Based on the concept of legal awareness (Soekanto, 1982), most adolescents do not understand the legal implications of their actions. They view legal sanctions merely as external threats, not as part of moral values that must be adhered to. In this context, the law has not yet become living law (Rahardjo, 2009) because it is not embedded in the social consciousness of young people.

Drug abuse among Sumbawa youth is not only a criminal issue, but also a social and cultural one. Effective solutions must be directed at strengthening the social dimension of law, where law enforcement goes hand in hand with moral, social, and spiritual education. Only through the internalization of legal values into social consciousness can the law function as a living and meaningful social control.

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