





Being a Female Domestic Worker During the Pandemic Period from the Hope Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Pandemic processes are important factors triggering the changes in the psychological and sociological structure of society. The COVID-19 outbreak has embodied many variables affecting people's lives in several terms in Turkey as in the whole world. People have appeared to face many psychosocial and economic difficulties due to the social and economic conditions changing with the pandemic period. During this period, domestic workers are the first people who experience these problems in multiple ways. Hope is an important concept in terms of protecting and improving the well-being of domestic worker women who have serious problems in terms of social security, social relations and economic income. Therefore, this research aims at examining the hope mechanisms developed by female domestic workers against the difficulties they experience during the pandemic period between March-June 2020. As it known, hope increases the well-being of people. 15 female domestic workers participated in the research, which was designed in a descriptive phenomenological pattern. The analyses obtained as a result of the interviews held with the female domestic workers revealed that the findings were related to the themes of sources of hope and adaptation process during the pandemic. When the sources of motivation in the structuring of hope are reviewed, it is noteworthy that they are divided into the subthemes of social and inner sources. Considering the relationship of hope with the adaptation to the pandemic period, on the other hand, the subthemes of efforts on reducing concerns, rearrangement of the financial life and view of the future come to the fore.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 seriously affects the mental health of the general population (Mazza et al., 2020). When the psychological outcomes of COVID-19 are reviewed, it is seen to lead to many psychological and sociological problems such as panic, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and skepticism in the individual (Jakovljevic, Bjedov, Jaksic, & Jakovljevic, 2020). Against these problems, hope has a significant role in protecting the mental health and improving the well-being during the pandemic period (Shanmugam, Juhari, Nair, Ken, & Guan, 2020; Yıldırım & Arslan, 2020).

Miller (1988) states that hope is an important emotion existing in the nature of humans. Erikson (1959) asserts that hope appears in the basic trust vs mistrust stage, which covers the first years of life. The hope of the child

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whose needs are adequately met by the caregiver is also developed. Peterson and Seligman (2004) associated the concept of hope with thinking about the future, expecting that the desired results will be achieved, acting to enable the achievement of the desired results, and being sure that these efforts will enable the achievement of the desired results. Morse and Doberneck (1995) claim that hope develops as a response to a threat. Snyder (2000, 2002) states that traumatic experiences such as loss of a relative, loss of a job, and death will lead to the loss of hope. Individuals with high hopes act with curiosity against a new situation and exhibit a successful motivation in working under stressful circumstances. It is seen that hope increases the well-being of the individual in terms of his mental health (Ong, Edwards & Bergeman, 2006; Sheldon, Kasser, Smith & Share, 2002) and hopelessness has negative effects on the mental health of the individual (Beck, Steer, Kovacs and Garrison, 1985). In the research conducted by Yıldırım and Arslan (2020) during the COVID-19 period, hope was found to have a protective effect in terms of subjective well-being and psychological health. In a research carried out in Malaysia, people were reported to eat more healthily, question the meaning of life, and have the chance of communicating with their families more often during the quarantine (Shanmugam, Juhari, Nair, Ken, & Guan, 2020). In the study executed with 657 health professionals in the USA, participants expressed that they did exercise, joined virtual support groups and fulfilled their prayers to cope with stress during the COVID-19 period. As seen on these researches, most of the participants were found to be optimistic and improve their goals and approaches to the meaning of life (Shechter et al., 2020).

The pandemic has serious economic, sociological, and psychological outcomes (WHO, 2020). Around the world, many countries have taken quarantine precautions to control the infection during the COVID-19 period. Together with the quarantine, workplaces were shut down, and dismissals, downsizing and unemployment, which threatened the job security of the workers, were practiced. Due to this process, many people have had to cope with financial problems as well as their health-related concerns resulting from the pandemic (International Labor Organization, 2020; Wenham, Smith, & Morgan, 2020). However, in a crisis like COVID-19, altruism, empathy, trust and friendship are observed in individuals at an improved level, and they tend to help each other. In the face of a crisis that affects psychological health in many areas such as the pandemic, a tendency has emerged in people to endure, heal and be stronger. Domestic workers are at the forefront of those who experience the problems in multiple ways during this period. Domestic workers have experienced a serious crisis in meeting their basic needs such as unemployment, shelter, nutrition and health (International Labor Organization, 2020). All these challenging life events, that are difficult to cope with, have caused negative feelings for domestic workers. Beyond the negative emotions such as anxiety and fear experienced by domestic workers who work without social security and lost their jobs during the Covid 19 process, it is important to reveal sources of hope that have an important role in protecting their psychological health. This research was conducted for this purpose, aiming at revealing the sources of hope, which have a significant role in protecting the psychological health of female domestic workers during the pandemic.

2. Material and Methods

In this research, the phenomenological approach, one of the qualitative research patterns, was adopted. In this study, the meanings attributed to a certain experience (hope) by female domestic workers during the pandemic were described according to their viewpoints. For this purpose, the research method developed by Giorgi (2009) named "the descriptive phenomenological research pattern", which is based on Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, was used as the research pattern. In this direction, the data collection process was provided through semi-structured interview forms, and direct quotations were included to reveal the essence of the participants' feelings, thoughts and experiences. The following steps of descriptive phenomenological analysis were followed in the study: (i) The reading of transcripts/texts obtained from interviews from a phenomenological perspective and reaching an impression regarding the whole phenomenon (ii) differentiating meaning units that reveal different aspects of the whole, (iii) revealing the psychological aspects of the existing situation as much as the content of the narratives allow, (iv) revealing the general structure of the experienced phenomenon.

2.1. Study Group

This study was conducted with domestic workers women who are unable to go to work due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Participants were reached via social media (Facebook and Instagram). The interviews held within the scope of the research were conducted by the researchers themselves via telephone. The criterion sampling

method, (Patton, 2002) which is one of the purposeful sampling methods and would facilitate studying the cases complying with the research problem, was used in the research. For determining the sample, the criteria of "working for household chores, being a woman and not having a permanent illness that influenced the daily life and mental health" were taken into consideration. Since there was no certain size of a study group stated in qualitative studies, 15 individuals were interviewed within the framework of the existing time, conditions and the main objective of the study (Morse, 2000). The female domestic workers resided in Istanbul (10) and Izmir (5), which are among the metropolises of Turkey. Participants' ages varied between 30 and 52, and the average was 38 (SD = 2.35). The highest education level is high school, and the number of children is maximum 3. Moreover, one of the participants got divorced from her husband.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Code	Age	Education	Husband's work status	Number of children
P1	38	Primary school	Yes	2
P2	37	Primary school	No	2
P3	36	Primary school	Yes	2
P4	40	Primary school	Divorced	3
P5	38	Primary school	No	3
P6	39	High school	Yes	1
P7	35	Secondary school	No	2
P8	42	Secondary school	No	3
P9	40	Secondary school	Yes	2
P10	35	Secondary school	Yes	2
P11	32	Secondary school	Yes	2
P12	37	Secondary school	Yes	2
P13	40	Primary school	No	3
P14	30	Secondary school	Yes	2
P15	52	Illiterate	No	3

2.2. Data Collection Tools

A semi-structured interview form was used for data collection in the research. The relevant interview form was prepared by reviewing the literature on domestic workers and hope, and then it was finalized based on the opinions of the three academicians, who were experts in the areas of hope, indomitableness and social justice. The functionality of the questions was tested with two pilot studies. The basic question samples related to the interview questions are as follows: "What do you do to feel good during the day?", "What did you find important for yourself during the quarantine period?", "What do you feel/foresee about the direction of this period?", "How is your relationship with your employer now?".

2.3. Data Collection

Ethical permission for the research had been obtained from the Ethical Committee of the Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University. A semi-structured interview form was used for data collection in the research. The relevant interview form was prepared by reviewing the literature on domestic workers and hope in the context of coping, the sources of hope, secure attachment, commitment, and trust. It was finalized based on the opinions of the academicians, who were experts in the areas of hope, indomitableness and social justice. The functionality of the questions was tested with two pilot studies. The interviews held within the scope of the research were conducted by the researchers themselves via telephone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With pre-interviews, participants were informed and asked for appointments; then, their consent for the audio record was received. To better understand the conditions of the participants during the pandemic, a demographic information form was firstly used. In line with the questions of the semi-structured interview form, the participants were asked questions about their daily routines while staying at home during the pandemic, social support systems, financial situation of the family, and their predictions about the course of the pandemic. These questions were deepened with probe questions to understand their hope statuses regarding the pandemic period.

2.4. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The data obtained from the interview were first decoded. The 4-step data analysis process suggested by Giorgi (2009) was used since it was aimed to reveal the perceptions and experiences of female domestic workers regarding their hopes during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, for the analysis of the data, bracketing (researchers' suspension of all their knowledge, values, perceptions and experiences regarding the subject of the research), phenomenological reduction (referring to the determination of meaning units related to the experiences of female domestic workers during the COVID-19 period, which were stated in interview texts), imaginative variation (reaching the structural themes of the hope phenomenon based on the meaning units revealed via phenomenological reduction), and finally, the synthesis of the resulting meanings and essences were applied.

In this study, it was tried to provide internal validity via long-term interaction, in-depth data collection, expert's examination and participant's confirmation, while external validity was provided through detailed descriptive and purposeful sampling methods. Besides, consistency examination was performed for internal validity and confirmation examination for external validity. Prior research subjects of the researchers and their sensitivity towards social justice have led them to this study. The researchers' subjective study experiences formed a supportive basis for the analysis and interpretation of the data.

3. Results

As a result of the analysis of the interviews held in the research and in line with the opinions of the female domestic workers who participated in the study, basic themes and subthemes related to the structure and essence of the hope phenomenon during the COVID-19 outbreak are stated and explained in detail with citations from the qualitative data below.

3.1. Sources of hope

The main theme of sources of motivation consists of the subthemes of inter and intrapersonal factors. It is seen that the participants carried on their communication with their social environments during the pandemic, although not face to face. Participants, who kept their social support networks by staying in touch with their social environments via devices like cell phone, express that spending time and sharing with family members increase their well-being levels. During the pandemic, participants are observed to resort to religious beliefs as a source of coping, try to interpret the happenings within their beliefs and thank God by thinking that there must be a meaning in it although it is a disease, use their intrapersonal factors by praying to be healthy and raise their hopes for the future.

3.1.1. Interpersonal factors

The sub-theme of social sources is comprised of the codes of the social environment, supportive relationships between spouses, and getting closer to family members. Participants state that they see their family members face to face because they share the same building with their close relatives and live in a family building, interacting with their social environment, although in a limited way, help them feel good to overcome the pandemic period and they try to overcome the period with mutual support. P12's narrative is a good example of this experience: *"Since we are in a family building, we are kind of trying to overcome it somehow. For example, we spent time together; they visited me, I visited them. We tried to overcome the period at home."*

A part of the participants states that they stay in touch with some of their employers via telephone. Staying in touch and feeling others' support make participants feel valued during the pandemic. It is seen that participants consider their bond with their employers friendly.

P12: We are always in touch with each other; we support and text to each other. They call me, I'm thankful to them. This is moral support, which is very important: feeling loved.

Participants are observed to stay in touch with their friends, whom they cannot see face to face, via video calls, etc., to try to break the isolation in this way, and to improve their support networks.

P14: We continuously talked over video calls or audio calls. It felt nice. I always talk to my elder sister. Even talking makes you feel good.

It is seen that the participants have obtained the support of their husbands when they could not work, and the house income has decreased during the pandemic. They have been supported by their husbands when it comes to both house income and their COVID-19-related concerns. The financial and moral support of husbands has improved the well-being of the participants.

P9: He says that it will not remain the same and it will be fine. He says that I will start to work and we will live within our means.

In this period, participants are observed to have played games with their children, watched movies, and fulfilled household responsibilities altogether. Besides the activities performed with children, they got closer to their husbands, as they stated.

P13: We spent more time with our family. I communicate with my children and husband. When you cannot go out and do anything, then you start planning things for yourself and your family. Let's watch a movie and make popcorn. We even do clean-up together. We have got closer to each other in this period.

3.1.2. Intrapersonal factors

The subtheme of inner sources includes the codes of praying, questioning the meaning of life and being thankful. Participants are seen to pray, fulfil their religious duties and wish for health for themselves and humanity to reduce their concerns during the pandemic.

P6: I always prayed for the survival of my beloved ones. They should live and stay alive. I just wanted the people around to exist. I pray and read the Quran. It feels good.

Participants say that they have understood how important health is, even financial power is not enough to protect their health, and they have remembered the significance of their families and friends. Participants stress that health is of primary importance, remember their need to communicate with people and make use of their available sources.

P10: I don't want anything to happen to my children, my relatives and my friends. There's nothing else. People I love are important to me. Life has almost no meaning. No matter how much property you have. None of them feels useful when it comes to this disease. As long as we are healthy, it is fine; nothing else matters.

Participants are thankful that they are alive and healthy especially after the losses during the pandemic.

P3: Luckily, we know we are not sick. This is a big happiness for me.

Despite the financial losses and difficulties, participants are observed to be able to maintain their lives with help and to be thankful by saying that they are healthy and there are people in worse conditions than them.

P1: Even if the whole world is yours, it doesn't matter if you are not healthy. This is what I have noticed the most. I've thought I have good health, healthy children and a healthy husband even if I have nothing at home.

Participants state that they have relied on their beliefs to interpret the period they have gone through, everything has a meaning, even if it is a disease, it has a purpose, and still, we should be thankful. Emphasis is laid on being thankful, not reacting negatively, being in expectation for a better future and keeping hopes.

P7: If something happens, there must be a reason for it. We should be thankful for it so that we can come across better conditions in the future. A negative reaction does not have any use for anyone.

3.2. Adaptation during the pandemic

The main theme of adaptation during the pandemic consists of the subthemes 'efforts on reducing concerns, rearrangement of the financial life and view of the future'. It is seen that participants' hobbies, beliefs and exercise are important in protecting their psychological health. Participants find solutions by planning their priorities via the rearrangement of your financial problems and needs resulting from the loss of a job. They are also observed to make plans for the future and make efforts to achieve these goals.

3.2.1. Efforts on reducing concerns

The subtheme of efforts on reducing concerns includes the codes of contact with nature, suggestion, exercise, music and hobby. P11 says that she is in contact with nature to relax: "I lie down on the floor and listen to myself

by looking at the stars. This makes me feel relaxed. As if my soul leaves my body. It makes me happy even if I see the sky through a small gap. It feels like my brain is fully emptied. I like reading the Quran. I do it because it feels like the other side is only listening to me."

Participants said that they restarted their hobbies such as exercise, handicraft, knitting, and cooking to reduce their concerns about COVID-19. They express that these hobbies relax them, prevent them from thinking about the disease and feeling worried, and they make use of their spare time, which results from not going to work, efficiently.

P8: I listen to music with headphones. I do handwork. A headcover. I do lacework to spend time. At least, I feel good.

In coping with the anxiety related to the disease, they are seen to resort to autosuggestion and try to keep their hopes and beliefs that everything will be fine.

P12: When I experience something like that, I give advice and suggestions to myself: "Calm down, everything will be normal, everything is fine". I dealt with something else. For example, I cooked, I made milk puddings. I do exercise at home. I do cleaning, watch series, read a book, etc.

3.2.2. Rearrangement of the financial life

The subtheme of the rearrangement of the financial life consists of the codes of contenting, limitation of needs, and external financial support. Participants cannot go to work, and therefore, go through financial losses. However, participants, who often experienced financial difficulties in the previous periods of their lives, are adapted to this situation more quickly.

P4: We are managing it. We have been managing it since our childhood. We are used to it. Thank God, we are supporting ourselves.

Participants are trying to arrange their lives by minimizing their needs. With the pandemic, they have lost their jobs together with the sources to fulfil the daily needs of the household. Since the income earned per day before the pandemic was hardly enough to maintain their daily lives, they are observed to have no savings. Therefore, they are seen to rearrange their lives to meet their daily needs.

P3: We had not saved anything before. In this period, we have been down without any money. You have to think when a bill comes. How will I pay for it? For example, I got our natural gas subscription cancelled a long time ago so that no bills could come. I have begun to be more careful. I tell my son to turn off the lamp. You start to think about even 1 Turkish Lira. When you go to the market, you buy the cheapest things.

It is observed that a part of the participants had partial incomes from the lands in their hometowns, husbands of some participants went on working during the pandemic, others were helped by the families whom they visited for clean-up, but the husbands of another part did not work and could meet their needs only by applying for the credit opportunity of the state.

P15: Well, in our hometown, we have a hazelnut business. This is a side income for us. We are very thankful to my husband's workplace. It did not cut his salary and completed the money given by the state.

P6: The houses I visited helped me financially. I hope we will be all fine.

P13: I received a loan deferred for six months. Thus, we support ourselves with the credit.

3.3. View of the future

The subtheme of view of the future includes the codes of the belief that everything will be fine, the ability to socialize, expectations related to family members, and expectations related to oneself. Participants are hopeful that the pandemic period will be over; they believe they should keep their hopes, give priority to being healthy and be healthy.

P7: It will happen over time. God should give health first. Then, the rest will happen. My children, my husband and all the people on earth should be healthy. The rest will happen.

Expressing that it is their priority to spend time with their friends as soon as the pandemic period is over, the participants state that they previously had problems with allocating time for their friends and gave priority to

their work, etc. but they will give priority to their friends and delay their other work as soon as the pandemic is over. They are observed to expect that isolation will be over in the future.

P2: If the coronavirus disappears right now and if my friend calls me, I will leave my work aside and immediately leave. Work can always be done, when friends and family are away.

Participants who mentioned about the significance of seeing the family members outside the nuclear family stated that they dreamed about coming together with them and being together, chatting and hugging each other made them feel very good.

P8: I always believe that this period will be over hopefully in a short time.

P13: We have missed our elder family members. We will try to allocate time to these people. I have realized the importance of family bonds.

Participants are observed to dream about strolling around and spend time with their family members outside the home without any concerns. Participants dream of the future of their dreams and make plans about having a future altogether. It is seen that participants who talk about their dreams wish for the realization of their dreams and rely on their religious beliefs for it.

P2: I want to go out with my husband and children. I want to do something for my children. We dreamed about buying a house. I want to make it come true. Hopefully. We had beautiful dreams about the future. My only hope is to realize them before I die if God gives me a life long enough.

Participants are observed to have plans about getting a job with social security benefits and have become more insecure during the pandemic due to working without security benefits as domestic workers. Participants continue their education and make an effort to find a job with social security benefits and regular income.

P11: I will go to the Turkish Employment Agency on Wednesday and apply to work at the pay desk in a hospital. I have to sustain my life. One of the decisions I have made during this period is to graduate from high school as soon as possible, study at university and find a proper job. I am making an effort for it.

4. Discussion

The COVID-19 outbreak has embodied many variables affecting people's lives in several terms in Turkey as in the whole world. People have appeared to face many psychosocial and economic difficulties due to the social and economic conditions changing with the pandemic period (Soylu, 2020). During this period, domestic workers are one of the people who experience these problems in multiple ways. This research has a fundamental purpose of how domestic workers, who have experienced a serious crisis in meeting their basic needs such as unemployment, housing, nutrition and health (Domestic Workers Solidarity Union, 2020), cope with the challenges of the process and maintain their hopes. It was revealed that female domestic workers basically kept their hopes in two ways: sources of motivation and adaptation process during the pandemic. Several researches emphasize the importance of a positive viewpoint for solidarity (Walsh, 2016). Hope is important in terms of rebuilding the energies and lives and increasing the efforts on coping during the periods of stress and desperation. People tend to stick to their hopes in the middle of uncertainty (Walsh, 2020). In this aspect, in the study conducted, it can be said that putting forward the sources of hope of female domestic workers who suffered from intensive stress and anxiety constituted a significant source for increasing well-being and indomitableness.

In a study approaching the COVID-19 pandemic period in respect of post-traumatic stress disorder in China, young people, women and people with responsibilities were found to tend to exhibit more traumatic symptoms (Jiang, Nan, Lv, & Yang, 2020). Women from the lower socio-economic section and worked as domestic workers, who also comprised the study group of this research, can be told to be more open to the traumatic effect due to their gender and financial responsibilities. Female domestic workers are observed to benefit from some coping mechanisms to cope with the negative experiences and to be protected during the pandemic. In this research, where the experiences of female domestic workers during the pandemic period between March and June 2020 were discussed in terms of hope, the obtained data were shaped under the titles of sources of motivation and adaptation to the pandemic period. It was remarkable that inter and intrapersonal factors appeared quite effectively in coping with the negative outcomes of the pandemic period. According to Southwick, Vythilingam & Charney (2005), social support is highly important for the protection of physical

and mental health. It is reported that positive social support can increase the flexibility of the individual, protect the individual against the psychopathological development related to the trauma, reduce the functional outcomes of the trauma-related disorders such as PTSD. In this research, social support attracts attention as an important source in coping with the negative outcomes of the pandemic period, which has resulted in deaths and been extended all over the world.

The structuring of hope is crucial for the well-being of both the individual and the family the individual is included in. According to Walsh (2020), it is necessary to help families redirect their hopes while studying on the COVID-related losses. During the restructuring of hope, individuals can be provided with hope perspectives for the future while support is offered so that they can put up with long-term uncertainties and long recovery periods. As the studies have revealed, flexibility is provided by focusing on the effort to control what is possible, accepting what is uncontrollable, and coming to terms with what is unchangeable (Walsh, 2016). Also, in this research, the association of hope with various interpersonal factors seems important in terms of individual and family well-being as indicated by Walsh (2020). In a study conducted by Simmons et al. (2009) with 161 employees of an assisted living center, it was observed that secure attachment had a meaningful and positive relationship with hope and trust between employees and their supervisors. This finding is in line with the result of this research that the continuation of the contacts of the participants with their employers is effective in maintaining their hope level.

In a study conducted with health professionals in New York (Shechter et al., 2020), 80% of the health professionals were found to perform coping activities such as meditation and exercise. In another study carried out in Zimbabwe (Chirombe, Benza, Munetsi, & Zirima, 2020), activities such as in-house games, exercise, listening to music and dealing with the garden were performed as coping mechanisms during the pandemic. In this study, it is noted that female domestic workers resort to positive coping mechanisms such as contact with nature, suggestion, exercise, music and hobby although they have gone through quite a difficult period financially and morally. Especially intrapersonal factors shaped in women by praying, questioning the meaning of life and being thankful appear to result from becoming introverted and knowing themselves more closely by staying at home. It is thought that the use of rather moral sources is a cultural outcome.

In the report by the IMECE Domestic Workers Union, which was written in June 2020 and summarized the experiences of the female domestic women during the pandemic rather from a legal and economic perspective, it is stressed that female domestic workers have been faced with dismissal and most of them have experienced serious financial difficulties since they have no social security. In this study, it was seen that almost all the participants had serious economic problems. Although these difficulties, it was found out that women who felt helpless took measures to rearrange their financial lives and made new plans to shape the future.

5. Limitations and Recommendations

This qualitative study was conducted in quite a unique subject to research the hope levels of domestic workers. This study reveals how hope can be maintained in difficult times such as a pandemic. The study group consists of domestic workers, and the qualitative interviews in the research, which was carried out during the pandemic period, were held via telephone due to the isolation process. This is a limitation that visual and non-verbal cues cannot be observed in phone calls. Besides, many professional groups are working on daily wages; however, this study is limited to female domestic workers as a section of the daily wage workers. Additionally, the findings of the research were obtained from 15 female domestic workers who participated in the study from Istanbul and Izmir. It is assumed that the investigation of how the hope level works in female domestic workers in regions with different cultural structures will contribute to similar studies. Also, it is seen that among the activities that are good for the participants in their narratives are "reading books, trying to spend quality time and investing in yourself". However, it is seen that education policies for this are not carried out in our society. Therefore, as the forgotten and ignored segment of the society, it is considered important to provide educational support to domestic workers to improve themselves.

6. Conclusion

An individual thinks about the future, expects to achieve his goals, acts to obtain these results and waits for the outcome in safety. It is noteworthy that female domestic workers who have faced both financial and moral

difficulties during the pandemic are hopeful about the future, have made plans to arrange their own lives no matter if the pandemic is over, and have started acting to achieve their goals.

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