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## Determinants of reproductive behavior in urban settings a field-based sociological study in the city of Baghdad

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the factors influencing birth control and reproductive behavior in urban societies, with a particular focus on understanding reproductive patterns in such environments, and more broadly across different societal contexts. It also seeks to uncover the secondary effects of reproductive behavior on communities. The research was conducted through fieldwork in the city of Baghdad. The study population consisted of mature, married women. Due to the large size of the target population, a *simple random sample* was drawn from one of the neighborhoods in the capital to represent the broader population. The sample size comprised approximately 100 units from the original population. Data collection was carried out using questionnaires and interviews, and the data were analyzed statistically. The study yielded the following findings:

- Education is a significant determinant of reproductive behavior in general.
- Economic factors are among the most critical determinants of reproductive behavior, particularly in urban communities, where individuals tend to practice birth control in response to economic conditions.
- Social and cultural factors also play a substantial role in shaping reproductive behavior. Values, customs, and traditions are central in this regard. Additionally, cultural norms strongly influence reproductive practices, leading to variation in reproductive behavior across different societies depending on their cultural context.

**Keywords:** Psychiatric disorders, suicide, suicide attempt, first admission, recurrent admission

### Introduction

#### General Framework of the Research

#### Section One: Basic Elements of the Research

##### First: The Research Problem

Internal migration in Iraq from rural areas to urban ones, represented by cities, has significantly contributed to noticeable changes in certain social behaviors, including reproductive behavior. Birth rates among families in urban areas have declined in comparison to those in rural areas. In rural settings, the primary concern for families has traditionally been procreation, whereas in urban settings, the main concern has shifted to work. Therefore, this study attempts to uncover the determinants of this type of behavior. The research is framed around a central question:

#### What are the determinants of reproductive behavior in urban communities?

This central question leads to several sub-questions, including:

1. Is culture an important factor in determining reproductive behavior in societies?
2. Does the economic factor play a clear role in determining reproductive behavior in urban environments?
3. How do social factors influence reproductive behavior in general?

##### Second: The Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies in its endeavor to delve into a sensitive and complex topic, reproductive behavior, as it is not easy to identify all the determining factors of this type of behavior. The research has two types of significance:

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## 1. Theoretical Significance

This study addresses a relatively new subject, and thus, the research and its findings may serve as a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge in the fields of human and social sciences, enriching academic discourse and theoretical development.

## 2. Practical Significance

The findings of this research can potentially be applied in real-world contexts to address numerous issues related to birth control. If adopted by relevant authorities or institutions concerned with demographic and social affairs, these results could support efforts aimed at solving population-related problems.

## Third: The Objectives of the Research

All scientific research is driven by clearly defined goals that it seeks to achieve based on available elements such as the topic, title, and research plan. Accordingly, specific objectives are set and efforts are made to attain them. The primary objective of this study is to identify the determinants of reproductive behavior in urban environments, uncover patterns of this behavior, and assess both their direct and indirect impacts in such communities. Additionally, the research aims to produce results that support governmental and academic efforts to address social and demographic problems that hinder development in Iraqi society.

## Fourth: Research Methodology

This study is classified as an exploratory and investigative research, aiming to uncover the factors or determinants related to reproductive behavior. Several key methodologies were employed, including the descriptive method and social survey, utilizing essential research tools such as observation, interviews, and questionnaires.

The study population is confined within the administrative boundaries of the city of Baghdad, where a number of neighborhoods were selected due to the wide scope of the community. A purposive random sample consisting of 100 married women was selected from the original population of the study. This approach was chosen to ensure ease of access, reduce financial costs, and save time and effort.

Afterwards, the findings were generalized to the original research population. A questionnaire was distributed to the selected sample, and the data were analyzed using established statistical formulas commonly applied in the field of social statistics.

## Section Two: Concepts and Terminology

### First: Behavior

Linguistically, the term "behavior" (Arabic: *السلوك*) is derived from the root *salaka* (*سلك*), and it refers to the way a person lives and acts daily in various situations. The pattern of behavior is determined based on the prevailing morals in society, meaning that it represents the response of a living organism in the face of life situations.

Terminologically, behavior includes all actions and deeds performed by a person in a given social environment, whether hidden, such as thinking and remembering, or visible, such as motor and physiological actions. Behavior can vary in patterns; it may be voluntary, resulting from a person's desire or awareness, such as rational acts, or involuntary, meaning it occurs without conscious

awareness, such as breathing. (Hibatullah Dawood, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>.

### Second: Childbirth

The concept of childbirth has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an through stories of prophets that emphasize its significance to humans. For example, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) prayed to his Lord to grant him a child:

"My Lord, grant me [a child] from among the righteous." So We gave him good tidings of a forbearing boy. (Qur'an, Surah As-Saffat, verses 100–101).

The joy of Prophet Ibrahim's wife is described in the Qur'an:

"And his wife approached with a cry [of alarm] and struck her face and said, 'I am a barren old woman!'" (Qur'an, Surah Adh-Dhariyat, verses 29–30).

Also, Prophet Zakariya (Zachariah) prayed to God for a child:

"And [mention] Zechariah, when he called to his Lord, 'My Lord, do not leave me alone [without an heir], while You are the best of inheritors.'" (Qur'an, Surah Al-Anbiya, verse 89).

This concept has been known since ancient times as a fundamental instinct in living beings. All creatures seek reproduction, and the highest among them, humankind, has been deeply interested in childbirth since antiquity. It provides a sense of reassurance regarding the continuation of life in another form. Childbirth is an instinctive state in humans aimed at preserving the human species and ensuring the continuity of life. Moreover, in patriarchal societies, it is often viewed as a symbol of strength. (Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, 1989).

### Second: Reproductive Behavior

Reproductive behavior is defined as the actual desire of individuals (the couple) to have children, provided they have the capacity for it (fertility). It refers to the actions taken by the couple in order to bear children based on their own will, or to abstain from childbearing, also based on their own will (Hanaa Mohsen Al-Ukaili, 1989).

It is also understood as the ability of individuals to reproduce, which is influenced by social, demographic, economic, and cultural factors. These factors, in turn, affect the nature of the community, the family, and the social system as a whole (Suad Shater, 1988).

The traditional meaning of this concept emphasizes the family's full reliance on the children they produce. In this context, reproductive behavior is considered positive, as extended families tend to have more children to help with agricultural work. Behavior here means a deliberate action performed by an individual to achieve a certain benefit or based on personal desire. In terms of childbearing, some couples may wish to have many children, while others may limit childbirth, and some may refrain from it altogether. This is influenced by several factors, most notably socio-cultural and, primarily, economic ones (Mahmoud Katta' Abdullah, 2004).

Therefore, reproductive behavior represents the strategies adopted by individuals, or more precisely, couples or families, with the aim of reproduction and the continuation of passing their genes to their offspring, or to refrain from reproduction. This type of human behavior is rooted in the nature of the prevailing social system in the community and the beliefs, customs, social values, and available economic

resources it holds. (Jay S. Rosenblatt and B. R. Komisaruk, 2013) <sup>[12]</sup>.

The researcher defines "reproductive behavior" as the manner in which couples act in relation to their performance in human reproduction, which is considered the primary function of the family. This behavior varies based on several factors, most notably economic and socio-cultural ones, as these play a significant role in shaping this type of behavior, particularly in urban areas, which are characterized by high levels of education and where the majority of the population strives for additional work and where women actively participate alongside men in administrative and professional jobs. In contrast, this behavior differs in rural communities, where the woman's primary role is reproduction and child-rearing.

## Previous Studies, Interpretive Theories, and Determinants of Reproductive Behavior

### Section One: Previous Studies

**First:** A study conducted by *Sulwan Fawzi Abd* on reproductive behavior, titled "Fertility and Its Relationship with Reproductive Behavior, An Anthropological Study in the City of Al-Hilla," (Sulwan Fawzi Abd, 2015).

#### 1. Research Problem

This study attempts to explore demographic changes and the essential elements within population composition, such as age and gender, given that reproduction directly affects these elements and is closely linked to fertility, which refers to a human's ability to reproduce. The relationship between fertility and human behavior related to reproduction, known as "reproductive behavior", is central to this study. This process reflects in either an increase or decrease in population in any society.

The research is guided by a key question:

What is the relationship between fertility and reproductive behavior among married individuals in Iraqi society?

Several sub-questions stem from this main question, focusing on the concepts of fertility and reproductive behavior.

#### 2. Importance of the Study

This study holds significant importance as it provides answers to a crucial anthropological topic in the field of sociology, both theoretically and practically. The subject is deeply connected to the structure and anthropological nature of society. The importance of the study lies on two levels:

- **Theoretical level:** The research contributes to enriching sociological inquiry as an academic discipline and the social sciences in general, by offering scientific sources that reflect on the reality of scientific research.
- **Practical level:** The findings of the study can be utilized by specialists to address problems caused by fertility patterns and reproductive tendencies, as well as the influencing factors within Iraqi society.

#### 1. Research Objectives

Every study has certain goals it aims to achieve from the very beginning, starting from formulating the title to outlining the plan and subheadings. This particular study is distinguished by its anthropological objectives, which are as follows:

- To uncover the correlation between fertility and reproductive behavior.

- To identify the role of influencing factors on the reproductive behavior of married individuals in society.

## 2. Research Methodology

In order to achieve the intended objectives of the study, it was essential to follow a clear methodology that guides the research appropriately. The researcher adopted the descriptive method, social survey, and comparative approach as the main methodologies. Essential research tools such as interviews, questionnaires, and observation were also used.

## 3. Research Population and Sample

The researcher defined the original research population within the administrative boundaries of the city of Al-Hilla. Since the population is relatively large and it is not feasible to include all units in the sample, the researcher had to extract a portion of it, known as a sample.

A purposive random sample was selected, consisting of 360 units of married males and females. These participants were chosen from three different parts of the city, each referred to as a neighborhood (Arabic: hayy).

### 1. Research Findings

- The population density is lower in the urbanized parts of the city and higher in the poorer areas.
- The parts of the city with low fertility rates are characterized by higher educational levels, while educational levels are lower in the poorer neighborhoods.
- Religious values and social culture, including traditions and customs, have a significant influence in shaping the direction of reproductive behavior.

**Second:** A study conducted by Fantu Mamo Aragaw and others, titled:

"Spatial Distribution and Determinants of High-Risk Fertility Behavior Among Women of Reproductive Age in Ethiopia" (2023).

#### 1. Research Problem

In a country like Ethiopia, the trends of high-risk positive reproductive behavior pose serious challenges due to limited capacities in the economic, health, and environmental sectors. Families there suffer from severe shortages in various essential aspects of life. This elevated reproductive behavior creates significant pressure on the public health sector and poses risks to the lives of married women.

Thus, this study is guided by a fundamental question:

What are the determinants of fertility behavior among women of reproductive age?

Several sub-questions branch out from this main question.

#### Importance of the Study

The study holds considerable importance because, at the very least, it is directly linked to the demographic and economic reality of the region. Therefore, on a practical level, the research can offer immediate solutions to the problems faced by the local population. On a theoretical level, its significance lies in the knowledge it provides to research centers and scholars, encouraging them to undertake similar research projects. Moreover, it contributes significantly to enriching scientific and academic repositories, enhancing the availability of scientific and knowledge-based resources.



1. **Research Objectives:** This study was launched based on a clear set of goals it aimed to achieve, including:
  - To identify the determinants of reproductive behavior and its relationship with high-risk fertility.
  - To uncover the environmental, social, and economic factors influencing the determination of reproductive behavior.
  - To clarify the actual level of risk posed by fertility behavior in a marginalized society facing numerous challenges for women of reproductive age.
2. **Research Methodology:** The research methodology primarily included the social survey and descriptive methods as the main approach to guide the research process.
3. **Research Population and Sample:** The study population included all women of reproductive age in selected regions of Ethiopia during the survey years. A two-stage cluster sampling technique was used to collect demographic and health survey samples and stratify them. After dividing each region into urban and rural areas, 305 clusters or enumeration areas were selected in the first stage (93 urban and 212 rural). In the second stage, a fixed number of 30 households per cluster were selected with an equal probability of systematic selection from the household lists.
4. **Research Findings:** Large hotspots of high-risk fertility behavior were identified in Somalia, the Nations and South region, Tigray region, and Afar region in Ethiopia. A significant proportion of Ethiopian women engaged in high-risk fertility behaviors, which were distributed non-randomly across Ethiopian regions. Policy makers and stakeholders should design interventions that consider the factors predisposing women to high-risk fertility behaviors, especially women living in areas with a high prevalence of such behaviors, to reduce the consequences of high-risk fertility behavior.

**Keywords:** High-risk fertility behaviors, Demographic and Health Survey in Ethiopia.

**Third:** An Italian study conducted by Marco Breschi, Alessio Fornasin, and Matteo Manfredi on "Reproductive Behavior" titled:

"Patterns of Reproductive Behavior during the Transition Period, Italy, 2013" (Marco Breschi, Alessio Fornasin, and Matteo Manfredi, 2013).

1. **Research Problem:** Few studies have examined the role of intermediate fertility variables at the micro level in Italy. Much remains unknown about the impact of social and economic factors, which is why the mechanisms through which women control their fertility are still largely unexplored. Therefore, this research aims to shed light on these factors, starting from a key question:  
What are the patterns of reproductive behavior, and what factors determine them?
2. **Importance of the Study:** The importance of this research is reflected in the problematic questions it raises, representing a complex issue facing society.
  - On the theoretical level, the research contributes to covering sources and topics related to the current research subject. It also enhances research repositories,

publishing bodies, and libraries by providing scientifically significant material for researchers and theorists.

- On the practical level, the importance lies in applying the findings to real-life contexts, especially in demographic fields, which can help solve many complex problems.

### 1. Specific Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the role of education and socio-economic determinants in the fertility transition process across four Italian population groups, focusing on birth cohorts born between the late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century.
- This research is part of a broader project aimed at analyzing fertility transition in Italy at the micro level, emphasizing the interaction between educational attainment and socio-economic status.
- To identify the social and economic determinants influencing family size and the reproductive behavior of married women.

2. **Research Methodology and Tools:** The researcher employed a descriptive-analytical method, analyzing data from the 1961 population census, which included a fertility survey designed to collect information on the reproductive history of married women.

A negative binomial regression was conducted to examine the impact of various socio-economic determinants on the completed family size of these women. The results focused on several social and economic factors.

### 3. Research Findings

- A woman's education is more important than the family's economic status in shaping fertility levels. Women with higher education have smaller completed family sizes compared to illiterate women. Notably, fertility differences by educational attainment appear wider at the beginning of the transition period.
- Women with no formal education exhibit higher fertility than those with primary education, who, in turn, have higher completed family sizes than women with secondary or university education.
- Considering the very low labor participation rates of women born before 1912, this gradient may reflect varying degrees of openness and acceptance of innovative ideas and new behaviors, as well as differing levels of female autonomy.

### Section Two: Explanatory Theories

**First: Behavioral Theory:** This theory has deep historical roots, beginning with the social contributions of Ibn Khaldun and his ideas in his work "*Muqaddimah*" (Introduction to History), whose content closely parallels behavioral concepts. (Ali Ahmed Madhkour, 2001) <sup>[1]</sup>.

There is also a Western depth to this theory and its interpretive approach to individual behavior in society, tracing back to John Watson, who was among the first to focus on behavior and coined the concept of behavior as a theoretical approach explaining behavior. He conducted experiments demonstrating that learning shapes both "normal" and "abnormal" behavior alike (Mohamed Al-Sayed, 2006) <sup>[16]</sup>.

This approach focuses on behavior, especially regarding

how learning and change occur. It involves a process of guidance that encourages individuals to learn and perform the desired and ideal behavior. Its pioneers view human behavior as including habits acquired through social practices or learned from the environment in which individuals live. An individual's behavior crystallizes as a result of the conditions surrounding them, whether social, environmental, or economic (Mohamed Mahrous Al-Shenawy, 1994) <sup>[17]</sup>.

This theory is considered an important explanatory approach for reproductive behavior and is also one of the key approaches to explaining the phenomenon of social phobia. It assumes that anxiety and fear are traits acquired through socialization and the individual's life within their traditional community. This learned behavior is maintained procedurally after acquisition (Dickson, J., 2004) <sup>[15]</sup>.

Social phobia is thought to occur when an individual is exposed to socially intense situations that cause internal pain, and when facing a similar situation in the future, the new situation triggers the fear and anxiety experienced previously (Hayat Khalil, 2005) <sup>[10]</sup>.

### **Section One: Determinants of Reproductive Behavior in Urban Areas**

**First: Social Determinants:** Countries aspiring for economic and social development must define an ideological framework from which development policies and implementations emerge. This framework determines the nature of development and how it can be realized in practice. This is due to the significant role that religious beliefs and ideologies play in shaping behavior.

Max Weber, in his study "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," revealed a connection between development, values, beliefs, and ideological change. These differences are attributed to the shift toward Protestantism, which encourages attention to education and directs behavior according to standards of excellence. However, the change does not necessarily have to be a move toward Protestantism; various models of doctrinal and ideological reform can increase the need for achievement.

In traditional cultures, such as those in the Middle East, the tangible components of reality and value components support each other, creating cultural cohesion. (David C. McClelland, 1967; Raphael Patai, 1962) <sup>[4, 20]</sup>.

Social factors play a crucial role in explaining differences in fertility, as they directly impact the reproductive status of families. Individual traditions and customs, particularly those related to marriage, such as polygamy and childbirth, have a significant connection to reproductive behavior. Also, the social status of women, especially in relation to giving birth to male children, plays an influential role in this behavior.

This is evident in Iraqi society, where the status of women, and families in general, is often linked to the number of male children they produce according to social norms and traditions. (Firas Abbas Fadel Al-Bayati, 2014) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Furthermore, the prevailing forms of marriage in society greatly affect reproductive behavior. Societies with high rates of early marriage tend to have larger numbers of births compared to those with low or no early marriage. The age difference at marriage is an important social determinant of this type of behavior. (Faiz Mohammed Al-Eisawi, 2003) <sup>[6]</sup>.

**Second: Cultural Determinants:** The cultural factor, along

with its relationship to the economic and social conditions experienced in areas that attract migrants, has a significant impact on reproductive behavior. In other words, these individuals gradually acquire the culture of the societies they migrate to, and their reproductive culture slowly shifts until they reach the level of the host society's culture.

Individuals in societies with foreign cultures gradually adapt, but eventually, the new culture becomes fully ingrained in their identity, social status, and economic situation. This, in turn, reflects on their behavior, including their reproductive behavior—especially regarding fertility regulation in accordance with the cultural and social context of the host society. (Tian Shuiyuan, 2017) <sup>[19]</sup>.

The ongoing change in cultural concepts and the differences between modern and traditional societies directly affect reproductive behavior in urban environments. Urban areas are characterized by fast-paced work life and higher education levels. Families, usually composed of spouses, are constantly busy with work. Additionally, the culture of family planning and birth control in such societies plays a major role in this type of behavior. Culture is an important determinant in regulating reproductive behavior, avoiding excessive childbirth in urban communities (Mamoun Tarbiya, 2012) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Sociologist Friedman analyzed how cultural factors influence reproductive behavior in society. He examined how such factors affect fertility in general, especially in closed societies influenced by values and customs. He attributed the high birth rates in less developed societies to a closed cultural system rooted in traditional values and customs, which strongly influence reproductive behavior and are passed from generation to generation. These value constraints are deeply embedded in societies and cannot change arbitrarily because they are linked to each society's social systems, including religious and cultural values. These values affect the status of both men and women and define their social roles in the community (Alia Shukri et al., 2000) <sup>[2]</sup>.

**Third: Economic Determinants:** In traditional, less developed societies, there is a strong desire to have many children, especially sons, due to their importance in continuing the family lineage. These societies are characterized by the fact that only males control family property, particularly land. In most societies, only male children are allowed to participate in family land holdings within the context of extended family structures and collective land ownership.

Since agriculture is fundamental to the economic life in these communities, the most economically rewarding reproductive goal for couples is to have a large family, preferably with many male children. Extended family members may exert pressure on couples, which can escalate to the point where a man may marry another wife.

In this context, sons are also highly valued by women because they represent the only way for widows to inherit a portion of their deceased husbands' property. This, in turn, creates pressure to have male children as a means for women to protect themselves in the event of widowhood.

Although inheritance laws vary somewhat between states and ethnic groups, in most cases only male children are allowed to inherit the father's property or a larger share of it. According to Islamic law, however, female children also have inheritance rights. (Annmaria Milazzo, 2014) <sup>[3]</sup>.

## Results

### Is culture considered a determinant factor of reproductive behavior?

The responses obtained from the sample regarding the role of cultural factors in influencing reproductive behavior indicated that such an influence exists. The collected responses from the study sample showed that 92 units, representing 93%, confirmed this effect, while 7 units did not confirm it. From this, it can be simply concluded that the cultural factor plays an important and effective role as a determinant of reproductive behavior. Therefore, culture is one of the most significant factors influencing this type of behavior.

**Table 1:** Confirms the influence of the cultural factor on reproductive behavior:

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	93	93%
No	7	7%
Total	100	100%

### 1. Does lifestyle affect "reproductive behavior"?

The responses obtained from the research sample about whether lifestyle and its way influence reproductive behavior showed that lifestyle has a significant effect on this type of behavior, which explains the large variation between rural and urban areas. This was confirmed by 98 units of the research sample, while only 2 units did not confirm it. From this, it can be inferred that lifestyle acts as a fundamental determinant of reproductive behavior.

**Table 2:** Shows the role of lifestyle as a determinant of reproductive behavior:

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	98	98%
No	2	2%
Total	100	100%

### 2. Does education play a vital role in determining "reproductive behavior"?

The responses obtained from the research sample about whether education acts as an important determinant of reproductive behavior showed that 95 units of the sample confirmed this, while 5 units did not. From this, it can be inferred that education has an important role in directly influencing reproductive behavior. Education raises the cultural level of society, and communities with advanced education tend to have a culture and urbanization that also greatly affect reproductive behavior.

**Table 3:** Shows the role of education in determining "reproductive behavior".

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	95	95%
No	5	5%
Total	100	100%

### 1. Is the economic factor a determinant of reproductive behavior?

The responses obtained from the research sample about whether the economy acts as an important determinant of reproductive behavior showed that 90% of the sample confirmed this, while about 10% did not. From this, it can

be inferred that the economic factor significantly influences the determination of reproductive behavior, where welfare and economic development serve as key determinants of this behavioral pattern.

**Table 4:** Illustrates the impact of the economic factor as a determinant of reproductive behavior:

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	95	95%
No	5	5%
Total	100	100%

### 1. Do values, customs, traditions, and habits contribute to influencing "reproductive behavior"?

The responses obtained from the research sample regarding whether social factors, including values, customs, traditions, and habits, play an influential role in determining reproductive behavior showed the following confirmation rates: values were confirmed by about 90% of the sample units, habits by 70%, customs by 80%, and traditions by 95%, as shown in the ranked table below. From this, it can be concluded that the social factor plays an important role as a determinant in shaping reproductive behavior.

**Table 5:** Ranked table showing the impact of social factors as determinants of reproductive behavior.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Values	90	90%
Habits	70	70%
Customs	80	80%
Traditions	95	95%

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this research on the determinants of reproductive behavior in urban settings reveals that individuals' reproductive behavior in urban societies is influenced by a complex interplay of social, economic, cultural, educational, and health-related factors. The study demonstrates that urbanization, along with its accompanying changes in lifestyle, education levels, women's roles, and the availability of healthcare services, directly impacts families' reproductive decisions regarding the timing of childbirth, the number of children, and birth spacing. Additionally, societal values, economic pressures, and families' future aspirations play a central role in shaping this behavior, alongside the influence of media and health awareness campaigns in promoting family planning and awareness. By analyzing the findings, it becomes evident that enhancing community awareness, improving economic conditions, and providing reproductive health services are essential elements in guiding reproductive behavior toward more balanced and responsible choices in urban environments.

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