

Research Paper

The Correlation Between Aggression, Perceived Stress and Binge Eating Behaviour Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to study the relationship between aggression, Perceived stress and Binge eating behaviour among young adults. Aggression can be defined as “a response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism.” Stress is the body's non-specific response to any demand placed upon it to adapt, whether that demand produces pleasure or pain. Binge eating behavior is characterized by a tendency to eat quickly, feelings of guilt and shame after eating. The symptoms include eating food until feeling uncomfortable and even accompanied by feelings of nausea. The research has been conducted on 200 young adult students (100 male and 100 female) aged between 18 to 25. The tools that are used for the research are the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire, the Perceived Stress Scale, and the Binge Eating Scale. The data has been analyzed by using descriptive statistics and the spearman correlation method. The results show that 1) There is a significant positive correlation between aggression and Binge Eating Behaviour. 1) There is a significant positive correlation between Perceived Stress and Binge Eating Behaviour. 3) There is a significant positive correlation between Aggression and Perceived Stress. This insight is important for developing interventions that promote healthier coping strategies, emotional regulations and resilience. By understanding early, mental health professionals, educators and family can help young adults to manage stress and negative emotions effectively.

Keywords: *Aggression, Perceived Stress, Binge Eating Behaviour, Young Adults, Students*

Young adults are considered to be having the healthiest time of life. Yet, Young adults are in a complex developmental stage marked by significant emotional, hormonal, psychological and social changes. During this period individuals may feel heightened emotional vulnerability with a lot of mood and behavioural changes including aggression, stress and unhealthy eating patterns. These factors may have a profound impact on mental health and wellbeing. Binge eating has emerged as a serious issue in recent years which typically occurs due to emotional distress.

Recently there has been a wide increase in the ratio of mental illness among young adults globally. This increase has been linked to various factors such as diet and exercise. Mental

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illnesses and risk-taking behaviors correlate to the transition between the teen years and adulthood.

Aggression can be defined as the behavior aimed at harming others physically or psychologically. It can be distinguished from anger in that anger is oriented at overcoming the target but not necessarily through harm or destruction. (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018)

Aggression can be defined as “a response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism.” (Buss,1961)

The term aggression comes from the Latin word “aggressio” which means attack. Aggression is the most primary adaptive behaviour that has been used not only by human beings but also other species. Often aggressive behaviour intends to hurt others, either physically or psychologically which is motivated by the aggressor's feeling of anger and hostility, such aggression is known as hostile aggression. Violence and aggression refer to a different behaviours or actions that may lead to harm, hurt or injury to self or another person. Whether the aggression is verbal or physical when the intention is clear; mostly on harm, damage, or hurt other person physically or mentally, to dominate others. By examining the theories, such as Freud theory of aggression, social learning theory, the frustration aggression hypothesis theory, excitation transfer theory, general aggression model the study analyzes diverse aggression concepts.

Stress can be defined as the physiological or psychological response to internal or external stressors. Stress involves changes affecting nearly every system of the body, influencing how people feel and behave. (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018)

Stress is the body's non-specific response to any demand placed upon it to adapt, whether that demand produces pleasure or pain (Hans Selye,1950)

In day-to-day life, every individual faces some kind of challenge or obstacles. According to the challenges and obstacles, individuals will try to make decisions that will require adaptation. Sometimes there will be actual threats to the individual's well-being such as accidents, theft, sudden emergencies etc. Sometimes individuals may interpret some challenge as a potential threat such as exam anxiety, delay in submissions. Individuals will respond to these challenges based on their coping ways. A stressor can be defined as an event, experience or an environmental stimulus that creates stress in an individual. There are mainly two types of stressors; distress which occurs when people experience unpleasant stressors and eustress which results from positive events that still make demands on a person to adapt or change. Many students are aware that experiencing little anxiety or stress is helpful to them because it motivates them to study.

Binge eating behaviour can be defined as “consuming abnormally large quantities of food in a discrete time period with a concurrent sense of loss of control. Recurrent binge eating is associated with numerous adverse consequences, such as increased risk of obesity and its medical sequelae, as well as depression and other mental health problems. When the behavior is chronic and pervasive, it is diagnosed as a binge-eating disorder” (American Psychological Association, 2018)

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Binge eating behavior is characterized by a tendency to eat quickly, feelings of guilt and shame after eating. The symptoms include eating food until feeling uncomfortable and even accompanied by feelings of nausea (“Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5TM, 5th Ed.,” 2013).

The problem of overeating has been long accepted in human behaviour. Some individuals may eat so much until they become obese or otherwise develop some disease which may hamper their overall well-being. Recent conceptualization regarding the problem of eating ranges from irrationally chronic dieter till pathological overeating. In many cases, overeating may be a contradictory consequence of attempts at caloric restriction, including dieting (Abraham & Beaumont, 1982; Polivy & Herman, 1985, 1987; Ruderman, 1986; Williamson, 1990). Losing weight is the most common motivation behind dieting, yet diets are rarely successful at achieving lasting weight loss (Heatherton, Polivy, & Herman, 1991; Polivy & Herman, 1983; Stunkard & Pennick, 1979; Wilson & Brownell, 1980). Young adults dealing with mental illness may indulge himself in food that lacks nutrients and is high on salt, sweets and spice (Collins & Dash, 2020) and Binge eating can be explained through setpoint theory, Binge eating as escape from self-awareness, Dietary restraint theory. This research emphasizes the stress as an indicator of aggression and its link to academic success, we can create a better support system that will address the root cause of emotional distress which will ultimately improve the overall physical wellbeing and mental health outcomes.

Rationale

The young adults are often characterized by heightened emotional responses which makes them more vulnerable to various pressures including the aggression arising from internal as well as external stressors such as peer pressure, academic challenges, and family dynamics. If the levels of perceived stress is high it may worsen the aggressive behaviour which may contribute to emotional instability and maladaptive mechanisms to deal with the instability such as binge eating behaviour. Understanding the relationship between these variables may provide us a valuable insight about how young adults use maladaptive coping mechanisms to navigate the emotional distress or aggression and its impact on their behaviour.

Significance

The rationale highlights the vulnerability of young adults to stress, aggression and maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as binge eating, due to heightened emotional responses and external factors like academic stressors, peer influence and family demands. Understanding how these factors are interconnected with each other is important because it helps explain how emotional distress or stress may lead to unhealthy behaviours, creating a cycle of emotional instability. This insight is important for developing interventions that promote healthier coping strategies, emotional regulations and resilience. By understanding early, mental health professionals, educators and family can help young adults to manage stress and negative emotions effectively. We can create a better support system that will address the root cause of emotional distress which will ultimately improve the overall physical wellbeing and mental health outcomes.

Statement of the Problem:

- To study the relationship between aggression, Perceived stress and Binge eating behaviour among young adults.

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Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the relationship between aggression and perceived stress among young adults
2. To study the relationship between aggression and binge eating behaviour among young adults.
3. To study the relationship between perceived stress and binge eating behaviour among young adults.

Hypotheses of the Study

- **H1:** There will be a positive correlation between Aggression and Binge Eating behaviour among young adults.
- **H2:** There will be a positive correlation between Perceived Stress and Binge Eating behaviour among young adults.
- **H3:** There will be a positive correlation between Aggression and Perceived stress among young adults.

Sample:

The total sample was composed from Pune which is considered as an urban area. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 to 25. There were 100 female and 100 male participants in the study. All the participants were students, not working and living with their parents.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Age (18 to 25)
2. Gender (Male and female)

Exclusion criteria:

1. Previous Diagnosis of any mental disorder
2. Marital Status
3. Working Status
4. Accommodation

Research Design:

In this research, correlational study has been implemented to explore the relationships between Aggression, Perceived stress and binge eating behaviour among young adults aged between 18 to 25 years. For this research, the researchers used a purposive sampling method. through which 200 students which includes 100 male students and 100 female students have been selected from Pune. The methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, with data collected through well-established standardized scales for each variable and semi structured questionnaire.

Variables Used in the Study:

1. Predictor Variable:
 - a. Aggression
 - b. Perceived stress
2. Criterion variable:
 - a. Binge Eating Behavior
3. Control Variables:
 - a. Age

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- b. Previous Diagnosis of any mental disorder
- c. Marital Status
- d. Working Status
- e. Accommodation

Operational Definition

1. Aggression:

Participants scoring above 101 are considered to have a very high level of Aggression. Participants scoring below 61 are considered to have a low level of Aggression.

2. Perceived Stress:

Participants scoring below 13 are considered to have a low level of Perceived stress. Participants scoring above 27 are considered to have a high level of Perceived stress.

3. Binge Eating Behaviour:

Participants scoring above 27 are considered to have high levels of Binge Eating behaviour. Participants scoring below 17 are considered to have low levels of Binge Eating behaviour.

Research Tools:

- 1. Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire: (Buss & Perry, 1992):** The Authors of this tool are Arnold H. Buss and Mark Perry. The tool includes 29 items in which 2 items are reverse coded. The tool is a self-report scale which measures the four dimensions; verbal aggression, physical aggression, anger and hostility and each item is scored on 1 to 5 scale and the total score is the sum of all scores of the dimensions. The internal consistency of these tools is High (0.80 and 0.89) and has strong construct Validity.
- 2. Perceived Stress Scale:** The Authors of this tool are Sheldon Cohen, Thomas Kamarck, and Robert Mermelstein. The tool includes 10 items in which 2 items are reverse coded. It is a self-reported tool. The sum of all 10 items is the total score of the scale. The internal consistency of this tool is Good (0.70 to 0.91) and has strong construct Validity.
- 3. Binge Eating Scale:** The authors of these scales are Gormally, J., Black, S., Daston, S., & Rardin, D in 1982. The tool includes 16 items. Each item includes 3 to 4 statements which gives a range from no problem (0) to severe problem (3). The total possible score ranges between 0 to 46. The tool has Good internal consistency (0.85 - 0.92) and Strong construct Validity.

Procedure Of Data Collection:

The researcher conducted a correlational study to explore the relationships among aggression, Perceived stress, and binge eating behaviour among young adults. A Purposive sample of 200 (100 male and 100 female) students was selected to ensure diverse representation across Pune. Researchers collected primary data through questionnaires, with a primary focus on quantitative analysis to measure correlations among these variables. The study includes standardized psychometric tools, including the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire, the Perceived Stress Scale, and the Binge Eating Scale, to measure the respective constructs. Some qualitative questionnaires were used to provide contextual understanding and for better interpretation. It includes descriptive questions and researchers use both quantitative and qualitative methods for interpreting the data.

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Statistical Treatment:

For data analysis, SPSS software was employed. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the quantitative data, including measures such as mean, median, mode, skewness, kurtosis, range, and standard deviation to assess data distribution. Normality tests were conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. In the correlational analysis, Spearman's rho correlation was applied due to the non-normal distribution of the data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics:

		Aggression	Perceived Stress	Binge Eating Behaviour
N	Valid	200	200	200
Mean		83.48	19.87	10.12
Median		83.00	19.00	8.00
Mode		72a	17	2
Std. Deviation		16.957	6.618	9.119
Skewness		.213	.311	1.241
Std. error of skewness		.172	.172	.172
Kurtosis		-.308	.035	1.146
std. error of kurtosis		.342	.342	.342

1. Aggression

The aggression scores have mean of 83.48 with a range from 77 and 90 which indicates moderate level of aggression among young adult students. The negative kurtosis (-.308) suggests there are some outliers and extreme ends in the data. The skewness value .213 suggests a slight right (Positive) skew which means some participants have unusual high scores in aggression. The standard deviation is 16.957 which means there is a moderate spread in aggression score among young adults.

2. Perceived stress

The perceived stress has mean 19.87 with a range from 14-26 which indicates moderate level of perceived stress among young adult students. The skewness value .311 suggests a slight right (Positive) skew which highlights the slight tendency of moderate perceived stress among young adults. The kurtosis .035 suggests a platykurtic distribution which highlights the perceived stress having fewer extreme values. The standard deviation value 6.618 suggests that there is significant variance in the data in how individuals perceive stress.

3. Binge Eating behaviour

The Binge Eating Behaviour has mean 10.12 with a range from 0 to 17 which indicates Low level of Binge Eating Behaviour among young adults. The skewness value 1.241 suggests

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higher binge eating scores than expected in a normal distribution curve. The kurtosis value 1.146 suggests a leptokurtic than a normal distribution which highlights the moderate tendency of Binge Eating Behaviour for outliers. The standard deviation value 9.119 suggests that scores vary significantly from the average. For the test of normality Shapiro Wilk test has been used and the scores indicate the significant level of binge eating behaviour.

CORRELATION

Table 2: Correlation table:

Spearman's rho			Aggression	Perceived Stress	Binge Eating Behaviour	
	Aggression	Correlation coefficient		1.000	.270**	.293**
		Sig. (2-tailed)			<.001	<.001
		N		200	200	200
	Perceived Stress	Correlation coefficient		.270**	1.000	.158*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001		.025
		N		200	200	200
	Binge Eating Behaviour	Correlation coefficient		.293**	.158*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	.025	
		N		200	200	200

Table 3: Regression table

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	F	Sig	Standardized coefficients Beta
1	.298a	.089	.084	19.290	<.001	.298

- a. Dependent Variable: Binge Eating Behaviour
a. Predictors: (Constant), Aggression

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	F	Sig	Standardized coefficients Beta
1	.153a	.023	.018	4.738	.031	.153

- a. Dependent Variable: Binge Eating Behaviour
a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Stress

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Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	F	Sig	Standardized coefficients Beta
1	.286a	.082	.077	17.694	<.001	.286

- a. Dependent Variable: Aggression
a. Predictors: (Constant): Perceived Stress

In this analysis, the relationship between Aggression, Perceived Stress and Binge Eating Behaviour were assessed through spearman rho correlation. For the test of normality Shapiro Wilk test has been used and the scores indicate the significant level of binge eating behaviour.

1. Aggression and Binge Eating Behaviour:

The spearman rho value of .293 indicates the significant positive correlation between Aggression and Binge Eating Behaviour. This suggests that individuals with higher aggression leads to more Binge eating behaviour. The correlation is statistically significant at 0.01 level (<.001), indicating the significant association. Meaning managing aggression may also reduce the binge eating behaviour. The regression analysis shows that aggression significantly predicts the Binge eating behaviour ($B = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$). Aggression explained about ($R^2 = 0.089$) 8.9% of variation in binge eating behaviour.

2. Perceived Stress and Binge Eating Behaviour:

The spearman rho value of .158 indicates the significant positive correlation between Perceived Stress and Binge Eating Behaviour. This suggests that individuals with higher Perceived Stress may lead to more Binge Eating Behaviour. The correlation is statistically significant at 0.05 level (.025), indicating the significant association so perceived stress can be one of the pillars for managing the Binge Eating Behaviour. The regression analysis shows that Perceived stress positively predicts the Binge eating behaviour ($B = 0.153$, $p = 0.031$). Perceived Stress explained about ($R^2 = 0.023$) 2.3% of variation in binge eating behaviour.

3. Aggression and Perceived Stress:

The spearman rho value of .270 indicates the significant positive correlation between Aggression and Perceived Stress. This suggests that individuals with more perceived stress may exhibit high aggressive tendencies. The correlation is statistically significant at 0.01 level (<.001), indicating the significant association which highlights that managing perceived stress may lower the aggressive behaviour in an individual. The regression analysis shows that perceived stress significantly predicts the aggression ($B = .286$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived stress explained about ($R^2 = 0.082$) 8.2% of variation in aggression.

DISCUSSION

The link between Aggression, Perceived Stress and Binge Eating Behaviour shows a valuable understanding about the factors affecting an individual's mental health.

1. There is a positive correlation between Aggression and Binge Eating Behaviour among young adults.

As per the analysis, the relationship between Aggression and Binge Eating Behaviour is statistically significant, as indicated by spearman's rho of .293** ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that the hypothesis has been accepted. The regression analysis shows that aggression

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significantly predicts the Binge eating behaviour ($B = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$). Aggression explained about ($R^2 = 0.089$) 8.9% of variation in binge eating behaviour.

Some individuals who are more in a state of aggression tend to eat greater than the usual limit, so if one increases, the other will ultimately increase. While aggression is more attributed externally, Binge Eating is mainly attributed internally as an attempt to manage or numb the difficult emotional states. The body and mind, overwhelmed by the tension may choose different maladaptive ways to regain a control over the emotional distress. Aggression and Binge Eating may reinforce each other. Although the Correlation between Aggression and Binge Eating is significantly correlated, the results state the range of aggression in Participants is moderate while the Binge eating is low. The reason behind this is the factor anger which has a high range while verbal aggression ranges moderate in participants. The participants perceive verbal aggression as a way of venting out or expressing. The ratio of exercise and meditation is also high in participants which also shows the participants are also concerned about their physical health and diet which can be the reason of the low binge eating scores.

One research has been done on Young Adults regarding the association between negative emotions which includes anger and sadness and binge eating behaviour and This research mainly focuses on negative emotions like sadness and anger as a trigger point for binge eating episodes or tendencies. This research gives significant attention to negative emotional regulation difficulties in binge eating than positive emotional regulation. (Howells et al., 2023).

Another research done by Wallis and Hetherington in 2009 suggested that heightened stress and negative emotional states such as aggression, may show binge eating behaviours (Wallis & Hetherington, 2009).

According to the theory of Lazarus, an external event does not directly exhibit any emotional response, but how individuals interpret or appraise those events. When individuals interpret an event as threatening or challenging, it leads to various negative responses which include aggression and to cope with the aggression individual may try different strategies which may include Binge Eating Behaviour.

2. There is a positive correlation between Perceived Stress and Binge Eating behaviour among young adults.

As per the analysis, the relationship between Perceived Stress and Binge Eating Behaviour is statistically significant at 0.05 level as indicated by spearman's rho of .158*(p .025) This indicates that the hypothesis has been accepted. The regression analysis shows that Perceived stress positively predicts the Binge eating behaviour ($B = 0.153$, $p = 0.031$). Perceived Stress explained about ($R^2 = 0.023$) 2.3% of variation in binge eating behaviour.

According to the analysis, some individuals may resort to binge eating as a way of coping mechanism during high stress. Stress is not only the presence of stressors but the overwhelming uncontrolling feeling an individual feels. While stress may not impact binge eating behaviour directly all the time but it can be the triggering point for emotional discomfort. When the stress is chronic, it can exhaust an individual's emotional and mental resources. In such situations food works as a comfort zone like a way to deal with emotional distress as well as stress. For many individuals binge eating is mainly driven by an

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immediate need to soothe themselves. This pattern is especially common in an individual who has not yet developed healthier ways to deal with the stressors.

According to other research, perceived stress increases when individuals perceive an imbalance between environmental demands and their ability to cope with these demands. And according to the results, Individuals prone to binge eating often exhibit heightened sensitivity to the environmental demands and don't feel ready to meet the expectations (Li et al., 2024).

Another study has also been done by Lim et al in 2021 on adolescents and the results indicate that high levels of stress and anxiety can lead to binge eating behaviour through cognitive restraint (Lim et al., 2021).

3. There is a positive correlation between Aggression and Perceived stress among young adults.

As per the analysis, the relationship between Aggression and Perceived Stress is statistically significant at 0.001 level as indicated by spearman's rho of .286** (p .001) This indicates that the hypothesis has been accepted. The regression analysis shows that perceive stress significantly predicts the aggression (B = .286, p < 0.001). Perceived stress explained about ($R^2 = 0.082$) 8.2% of variation in aggression.

According to the analysis, perceived stress doesn't always come from some tangible sources, an individual often interprets the situation by their availability of coping mechanisms. When these stresses become uncontrollable or unmanageable it also leads to emotional dysregulation. This aggression may offer an immediate release of built-up tension which is generally maladaptive. It can be the external projection of internal tension. Aggression can be the symptom of internal conflicts or internal stress. As stress provokes aggression or frustration, aggressive responses may also create more perceived stress. After an outburst an individual may feel guilty or remorse which may lead to perceived stress. Stress can also cause emotional inhibition which refers to the lowering of an individual's threshold for irritability or impulsivity.

One research suggests that stress exposure increases aggression and these effects are mediated by changes in the frontal brain activity, with left- lateralized patterns suggesting heightened aggression (Verona & Sadeh, 2009).

Another research done by Ju and Park in 2022 and suggests significant positive correlations between perceived stress, intolerance of frustration, anger rumination, and aggression. 2) The correlation between perceived stress and aggression by the mediating effect of intolerance of frustration was found to be significant, 3) the mediating effect of anger rumination was not significant. 4) The relationship between perceived stress and aggression by the dual mediating effect of intolerance of frustration and anger rumination was significant (Ju & Park, 2022).

According to the theory of Lazarus, an external event does not directly exhibit any emotional response, but how individuals interpret or appraise those events. When individuals interpret an event as threatening or challenging, it leads to various negative responses which include aggression.

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CONCLUSION

1. There is a positive correlation between Aggression and Binge Eating Behaviour among young adults.
2. There is a positive correlation between Perceived Stress and Binge Eating behaviour among young adults.
3. There is a positive correlation between Aggression and Perceived stress among young adults.

Limitations

1. Geographical limitation: Only one city has been covered. Many emotional and behavioural patterns are strongly influenced by cultural and geographical norms.
2. Age limitation: Although the age group is developmentally similar in a group. The individual in the age of 18-20 experience more emotional instability, mood swings and transitions than the individual in 21-25. This age group may show more emotional impulsivity than older adults.
3. Family type: The nuclear and joint family type may also play a crucial role for emotional stability, impulsivity, eating patterns and perceived stress. The quality of family relationships, family size, parental involvement all these factors play an important role.

Future Research Direction

1. Age related: the study can be done on different age groups mainly adolescents who are on the verge of heightened emotional dysregulation.
2. Occupation related: The research can be done on the population of specific occupation; the stressors, aggression and eating patterns can be seen.
3. Gender related: the research can be done on the basis of gender. The problems and stressors of female or male experiences and how they cope with the anger can be seen.
4. Individuals living away from their home: the study can be done on the people living away from their own. They have different stressors, Eating patterns and coping styles.

Implications:

- Mental health interventions- Incorporating the programs that can assess emotional regulation, stress levels and eating behaviours can identify the problem early. Developing peer group support may have benefits for young adults for building emotional resilience and reducing social triggers of stress and aggression.
- Stress management programme- Incorporating tools for managing acute stress and emotional dysregulation. Young adults can be trained in recognizing early signs of stress and impulsivity which leads to binge eating behaviour.
- Parent education and awareness- Educating parents about how stress and aggression manifest in their children that can help in identifying risk factors early. Training parents to incorporate non-violent communication and emotional support techniques may reduce inter-family aggression and emotional distress.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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