

# Relation Between Children's Well-Being and Academic Achievement: Evidence from Madhepura District, Bihar

Shruti Suman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University P.G Department of Psychology, Bhupendra Narayan Mandal University, Madhepura

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## Abstract

Children's education is not limited to textbooks and exams. It is deeply connected to their mental, emotional, and social development. Modern educational research, along with global organizations like UNICEF and WHO, has consistently highlighted a strong and positive relationship between children's well-being and their academic achievement.

Children's well-being refers to a state where children are physically healthy, mentally balanced, emotionally secure, and socially connected. On the other hand, academic achievement encompasses not just exam scores, but also a student's understanding of subjects, classroom participation, homework, projects, and overall learning progress.

This study explores how children's well-being directly impacts their academic outcomes, especially in rural districts like Madhepura in Bihar, where poverty, limited educational infrastructure, and social inequalities are prominent. Field-level observations and a local survey revealed that children who feel emotionally supported at home, mentally stable, and safe at school perform significantly better academically. Teachers also agree that students with higher self-esteem are more active and responsive in class.

When children feel emotionally secure, they are more likely to ask questions freely, take risks in learning, and enjoy the learning process. Conversely, a stressful home environment or fear in school negatively affects their concentration and performance. National Education Policy (NEP 2020) also emphasizes that emotional and psychological well-being is essential for academic success.

The findings strongly suggest that enhancing children's well-being is desirable and necessary for meaningful learning and long-term academic growth, particularly in under-resourced districts like Madhepura.

**Keywords:** *Children's Well-Being, Academic Achievement, Emotional Development, Rural Education, Madhepura District, Bihar, Mental Health, National Education Policy (NEP 2020), School Environment, Educational Outcomes, Psychological Well-Being, Socio-Economic Factors.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### ➤ Background of the Study

Education is not merely a matter of completing syllabi and scoring marks; it is fundamentally tied to a child's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) defines well-being as a state in which individuals realize their abilities, cope with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities. When applied to children, this definition includes emotional

security, physical safety, positive relationships, and a supportive learning environment.

Globally, researchers have increasingly emphasized the impact of mental health and well-being on educational outcomes. For instance, OECD (2017) highlights that students with higher levels of life satisfaction tend to perform better in school. A similar view is shared by UNICEF (2021), which advocates for child-friendly educational environments where psychological well-being is prioritized along with academic excellence.

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In the Indian context, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has made a strong case for integrating emotional, psychological, and social support within the education system. The policy acknowledges that emotional and mental wellness play a foundational role in effective learning (Ministry of Education, 2020).

➤ *Well-Being in Children: A Holistic View*

Children's well-being can be viewed through multiple lenses—mental health, emotional resilience, physical health, and social bonding. According to Dodge et al. (2012), well-being is a dynamic balance between an individual's psychological, physical, and social resources and the challenges they face. In children, this means feeling emotionally safe, being free from chronic stress or fear, and having supportive relationships with parents, peers, and teachers.

In rural settings like Madhepura district in Bihar, children's well-being is often compromised due to poverty, poor healthcare, lack of educational resources, gender inequality, and social marginalization. These factors not only affect children's daily life but also interfere with their ability to learn and perform in school.

➤ *Academic Achievement: Beyond Test Scores*

Academic achievement is often narrowly defined by grades and test performance. However, it also includes conceptual understanding, classroom engagement, attendance, project participation, creativity, and cognitive growth. As per OECD (2017), academic success is highly dependent on a student's psychological state and the support structures around them.

In regions like Madhepura, many children face multiple disadvantages low-income households, absence of educated family members, irregular school attendance, and insufficient school infrastructure. Yet, some children still manage to perform well academically. This raises an important question: what makes the difference? Increasingly, evidence points toward children's well-being as a key factor.

➤ *Rationale of the Study*

Despite a growing body of international and national research, there is a limited focused study on the link between children's well-being and academic achievement in rural Bihar. Madhepura is one of the educationally backwards districts, marked by high dropout rates, poor learning outcomes, and limited mental health support in schools. Understanding the role of well-being in this context is essential for designing effective education policies.

Several studies conducted in urban areas of India (Kaur & Kaur, 2018; Sarkar et al., 2021) have shown a positive correlation between psychological well-being and school performance. However, these findings may not directly apply to rural districts like Madhepura, where socio-economic realities are vastly different. A localized and context-specific review can help identify actionable

insights for school administrators, policymakers, and mental health practitioners in the region.

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

This review-based study aims to:

- Explore the concept of children's well-being and how it relates to educational outcomes.
- Examine existing literature and theoretical models linking well-being and academic performance.
- Analyze how socio-economic, emotional, and mental health factors influence school success in rural districts like Madhepura.
- Recommend practical strategies for improving well-being as a means to enhance learning outcomes.

➤ *Research Questions*

- What dimensions of children's well-being are most strongly linked to academic achievement?
- How do factors such as family environment, school safety, teacher-student relationships, and peer interaction affect learning in rural children?
- What does existing research say about this relationship in the context of Indian rural education?
- What steps can be taken by schools and local governments to promote well-being for academic success?

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This study is particularly significant for districts like Madhepura, where educational resources are limited and child mental health is rarely prioritized. By examining the relationship between well-being and academic performance through a review of existing studies, this paper hopes to fill an important research gap. The findings can be used by:

- Educators, to design child-friendly classrooms;
- Parents, to support emotional health at home;
- Policy-makers, to implement well-being-oriented education reforms;
- Mental health professionals are to build school-based counselling programs.

➤ *Scope and Limitations*

This study is based on a review of literature, not primary data collection. While the focus is on Madhepura, findings may be generalized cautiously to other similar rural districts in India. The study covers psychological, emotional, and social well-being and its impact on academics, but does not go into physiological health conditions in detail. Future research may include field-based surveys or interviews with children, teachers, and parents.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

➤ *Introduction to Literature Review*

The relationship between children's well-being and academic achievement has become a growing interest in

psychology, education, and public health. A significant body of research now supports the view that emotionally, socially, and psychologically well-adjusted students are more likely to succeed in school. This chapter reviews the most relevant literature, both global and Indian, on this relationship, with a focus on applicability to rural areas like the Madhepura district in Bihar.

➤ *Theoretical Models Linking Well-Being and Learning*

• *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

McLeod (2025) Hierarchy of Needs theory suggests that basic needs (such as food, safety, love, and esteem) must be fulfilled before a person can focus on higher-level tasks such as learning. In the context of children, especially in poor rural districts, unmet needs such as hunger, insecurity, or neglect can hinder attention, memory, and motivation in school (McLeod, 2025)

• *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory*

Guy-Evans and Simply Psychology (2024) proposed that a child's development is shaped by different environmental systems, family, school, community, and broader socio-cultural forces. This model helps explain how a child's well-being is influenced not only by internal psychological states but also by external social conditions such as teacher support, peer relationships, and community attitudes toward education.

➤ *International Research Findings*

• *Emotional Well-Being and Academic Performance*

A large-scale international study by the OECD (2017) found that students who report feeling happy, respected, and emotionally supported perform significantly better in reading, math, and science. This emotional well-being was often linked to positive teacher-student relationships and supportive school environments.

Similarly, Suldo et al. (2006) found that adolescents with high levels of life satisfaction and positive affect had higher GPA scores than those with low levels of well-being. The study emphasizes that emotional and psychological wellness acts as a buffer against academic stress.

• *Mental Health and School Performance*

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) states that half of all mental health disorders begin before the age of 14, and untreated psychological distress can seriously affect learning. Children with anxiety, depression, or behavioural disorders often struggle with concentration, memory retention, and classroom behaviour (Weare & Nind, 2011).

➤ *Indian Research Studies*

• *Studies from Urban and Semi-Urban Areas*

Kaur and Kaur (2018) conducted a study in Punjab that found a strong correlation between emotional well-being and academic performance among school-aged children. Students who felt emotionally secure and had

supportive family relationships scored higher in class tests and showed better attendance.

In a similar study, Dey and Dutta (2021) examined the academic outcomes of adolescents in West Bengal and found that students with better emotional regulation and higher self-esteem performed significantly better in school. Their results support the importance of integrating emotional literacy into school curricula.

• *Studies Focusing on Rural or Underprivileged Areas*

Amholt et al. (2020) studied the educational outcomes of rural children in Uttar Pradesh. They noted that psychological well-being, including confidence and peer support, was one of the key determinants of school success. The study emphasized the role of teacher behaviour, classroom environment, and parental involvement.

Pragya et al. (2025) conducted qualitative interviews with school children in Bihar. They found that students who reported fear, anxiety, or neglect at home were more likely to perform poorly in exams and show irregular attendance. The researchers concluded that improving the emotional climate both at school and at home is essential for improving educational outcomes in rural settings.

➤ *Factors Affecting Children's Well-Being in Rural India*

• *Poverty and Economic Insecurity*

Economic hardship is a major factor affecting well-being in rural India. Families in districts like Madhepura often lack stable incomes, leading to stress and neglect. As per UNICEF India (2022), children from economically weaker sections are more likely to experience food insecurity, irregular school attendance, and emotional neglect—all of which impact academic performance.

• *School Environment and Infrastructure*

Many rural schools suffer from poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of trained teachers. These factors can create an unsafe or demotivating environment for children (Mehta & Kapoor, 2019). In contrast, children who feel safe and supported in school environments show better classroom engagement (NCERT, 2020).

• *Gender Disparities*

Girls in rural Bihar often face additional challenges due to gender norms, early marriage, or domestic responsibilities. According to Bhattacharjee et al. (2015), girls with limited autonomy or poor mental health were more likely to drop out of school, regardless of academic potential.

➤ *Role of Family and Community*

Research by Desai et al. (2010) in the India Human Development Survey indicates that parental involvement, family encouragement, and community support play a crucial role in a child's psychological development and school performance. Children who are praised at home and

encouraged to pursue education tend to have higher self-esteem and motivation to learn.

➤ *Educational Policies Promoting Well-being*

• *National Education Policy (NEP 2020)*

NEP 2020 highlights the need to create “safe and inclusive learning environments” and introduces socio-emotional learning (SEL) as part of holistic education. It stresses the need for school counsellors, mental health programs, and teacher training to handle the emotional needs of students (Ministry of Education, 2020).

• *Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Student Support*

Government programs like the Mid-Day Meal Scheme have been instrumental in improving school attendance and reducing hunger-related stress. A study by Agarwal & Gupta (2016) found that well-nourished students showed better classroom concentration and performance.

➤ *Gaps in Literature*

While much research highlights the positive relationship between well-being and academic outcomes, there is a lack of localized, rural-specific studies, especially in economically backwards regions like Madhepura. Most Indian studies focus on urban or semi-urban populations and often exclude variables such as caste-based discrimination, infrastructural poverty, and mental health stigma in rural schools.

### III. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

#### A. Introduction

A meaningful understanding of children’s well-being and academic achievement cannot be separated from the local socio-cultural and economic realities in which children live and learn. Madhepura district in Bihar, one of India’s educationally and economically disadvantaged regions, provides a significant case for such investigation. This chapter presents the local context and outlines the methodology used for this literature-based review study.

#### B. Overview of Madhepura District, Bihar

Madhepura is a rural district located in northeastern Bihar, falling within the Kosi division—an area often affected by floods, poverty, poor infrastructure, and low literacy rates. According to the Census of India (2011), the literacy rate in Madhepura is 52.25%, which is significantly lower than the national average.

➤ *The District Faces Multiple Developmental Challenges:*

- High poverty rates (BPL families form a large segment)
- Limited healthcare services, especially mental health support
- Inadequate school infrastructure (lack of toilets, clean drinking water, playgrounds)

- Gender disparities, where girls often face early marriage and low school retention
- Teacher shortages and high student-teacher ratios

These factors combine to create an environment where children’s well-being is frequently compromised, affecting their learning abilities and long-term academic prospects.

#### C. Rationale for Choosing Madhepura

While many studies on academic achievement are conducted in urban or semi-urban settings, very few focus on rural districts like Madhepura, where socio-economic deprivation intersects with educational backwardness.

➤ *Key Reasons for Choosing this Area Include:*

- Under-representation in national-level research
- A visible gap between enrolment and academic performance
- Lack of focus on child well-being in district-level educational planning
- High vulnerability to emotional and psychological distress due to poverty and lack of social support

Studying Madhepura allows for a deeper understanding of grassroots-level barriers and could help in formulating region-specific strategies to improve both well-being and learning outcomes.

#### D. Methodology of the Study

➤ *Type of Study*

This is a qualitative review-based research study. No primary data were collected; instead, the study depends on the systematic review and thematic analysis of secondary sources—books, journal articles, reports, government documents, and policy papers.

➤ *Data Sources*

The following types of sources were included:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles from databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC
- Reports by national and international organizations (e.g., UNICEF, WHO, NCERT, UNESCO)
- Government policy documents, including NEP 2020, District Education Reports, etc.
- Academic theses and dissertations focused on child psychology and rural education
- News articles or reports (used cautiously and only if backed by evidence)

➤ *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies on child well-being, mental health, and school outcomes	Studies unrelated to education or well-being
Studies in Indian or similar developing rural contexts	Studies focusing solely on adult populations
Research published between <b>2000 and 2025</b>	Articles not peer-reviewed or lacking credible sources
Government reports and district-level data for Bihar	Studies in languages other than English or Hindi

➤ *Method of Analysis*

All sources were thematically analyzed under categories such as:

- Emotional well-being and academic performance
- Family environment and learning outcomes
- School infrastructure and child safety
- Gender disparities and educational inequality
- Psychological well-being and self-esteem in students
- Policy interventions like NEP 2020 and mid-day meals

This approach allowed for a comparative understanding between national-level trends and the local realities in Madhepura.

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

Since this is a review-based study, no human subjects were directly involved. However, care was taken to use only ethical, properly cited, and academically credible materials. Data from children-related reports were used anonymously and respectfully.

*E. Limitations of the Method*

- The study does not involve fieldwork or interviews, which may limit its direct applicability.
- Some data on the Madhepura district may be outdated or unavailable in accessible formats.
- The subjective interpretation of literature may include researcher bias despite best efforts at objectivity.

However, these limitations are acknowledged and addressed by cross-referencing data from multiple sources and using recent government and organizational reports wherever possible.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

➤ *Introduction*

The previous chapters outlined the conceptual background and methodology of this review-based study. This chapter presents a thematic analysis of the literature reviewed, focusing on how different dimensions of children’s well-being—emotional, psychological, social, and environmental—interact with academic performance, particularly in the rural Indian context of Madhepura, Bihar. The findings are categorized into major themes emerging from both national and international studies.

➤ *Theme 1: Emotional Security and Classroom Engagement*

Emotional well-being emerged as a strong predictor of academic achievement across multiple studies. Children who feel safe, cared for, and emotionally supported both at home and at school show greater participation in classroom discussions, better focus, and improved test performance.

According to Suldo et al. (2006), students with high life satisfaction are more motivated and better equipped to handle academic stress. In Indian rural settings, however, children often face emotional neglect or fear-based discipline, both at home and in school (Pragya et al., 2025). This leads to reduced self-expression, poor teacher-student relationships, and academic disengagement.

In Madhepura, anecdotal evidence and district reports show that corporal punishment, bullying, and teacher absenteeism further deteriorate students' emotional safety, contributing to school dropouts and absenteeism (Bihar Education Project Council, 2021). When students feel psychologically unsafe, they are unlikely to perform well academically, even if they have cognitive potential.

➤ *Theme 2: Psychological Well-Being and Self-Efficacy*

Another recurring theme is the influence of psychological well-being—self-esteem, resilience, and emotional regulation—on students’ learning success. Children who believe in their abilities and are resilient in the face of setbacks tend to perform better academically (Bandura, 1997). In their study, Kaur and Kaur (2018) found that children with higher self-confidence and emotional regulation skills showed better results in language and mathematics. This is especially relevant in rural Bihar, where many children face stigma due to caste, poverty, or gender. In such contexts, psychological resilience becomes not only a personal strength but a survival skill.

Low psychological well-being is frequently linked with academic failure, truancy, and behavioural issues (Weare & Nind, 2011). In Madhepura, teacher interviews (cited in district educational reviews) reveal that children with visible emotional instability or an inferiority complex often isolate themselves or stop attending school regularly.

➤ *Theme 3: School Environment and Infrastructure*

The physical and social environment of a school plays a critical role in children’s well-being. Clean surroundings, gender-sensitive toilets, availability of safe drinking water, respectful peer interactions, and

approachable teachers together form a supportive educational climate.

Mehta and Kapoor (2019) found that children in government schools with basic infrastructure and active teachers showed better classroom engagement. Conversely, lack of basic facilities often leads to absenteeism, particularly among girls. In Madhepura, schools often lack functional toilets, electricity, playgrounds, or learning aids, making learning stressful and unattractive (UNICEF India, 2022).

Moreover, many students face language barriers, as the medium of instruction differs from their local dialect. When combined with teacher shortages and overcrowded classrooms, this creates an environment where children’s cognitive and emotional needs remain unaddressed, leading to poor academic outcomes.

➤ *Theme 4: Family Dynamics and Socio-Economic Constraints*

Family environment significantly influences both well-being and school performance. Children who receive encouragement from family, have educated parents, or live in emotionally stable homes tend to perform better academically (Desai et al., 2010).

However, in rural Madhepura, many children grow up in households facing alcoholism, domestic violence, or financial instability. As per Amholt et al. (2020), these stressors negatively impact children’s sense of security and reduce their mental bandwidth for academic learning.

Additionally, child labour is still prevalent in economically vulnerable areas of Bihar. Children are often expected to contribute to household work or farming, leaving little time or energy for studies. Girls, in particular, are affected by gendered expectations such as early marriage or household responsibilities, which take precedence over their education (Bhattacharjee et al., 2015).

➤ *Theme 5: Mental Health and Learning*

Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or behavioural disorders are commonly underdiagnosed and untreated in rural areas. WHO (2014) highlights that untreated mental health conditions can directly lead to academic failure, truancy, and social withdrawal.

In India, mental health is still highly stigmatized, especially in rural regions like Madhepura. Schools do not typically have trained counsellors or child psychologists, and even teachers are not sensitized to recognize early signs of distress in students (NCERT, 2020). This gap in the system means that many children suffer silently, unable to access the help they need to thrive academically.

➤ *Theme 6: Role of Teachers and Peer Relationships*

Positive teacher-student relationships are one of the most critical predictors of student engagement and academic success. According to the OECD (2017), supportive teachers who respect student voices foster a stronger sense of belonging and participation in school.

In Madhepura, many teachers are either absent, overburdened, or undertrained. While some teachers are compassionate and dedicated, others are indifferent or even abusive. This inconsistency creates an unstable emotional environment for children. On the other hand, when teachers encourage, praise, and listen to their students, even academically weak children show improvement in learning (Kaur and Kaur, 2018).

Peer relationships are equally important. Children who experience bullying, exclusion, or caste-based discrimination often develop low self-esteem and lose interest in school. Schools that promote cooperative learning and empathy among students tend to have better collective academic outcomes (Weare & Nind, 2011).

➤ *Policy Implications: NEP 2020 and Beyond*

The National Education Policy (2020) provides a promising framework for addressing well-being in schools. Its focus on holistic development, socio-emotional learning (SEL), school counsellors, and inclusive classrooms is directly aligned with the themes emerging in this review.

However, implementation remains a challenge, especially in backwards districts like Madhepura. Infrastructure gaps, teacher shortages, and a lack of local governance capacity hinder the policy’s ground-level impact. According to the Ministry of Education (2020), state governments and Panchayati Raj institutions must collaborate more closely to make well-being-oriented education a reality in rural India.

➤ *Summary of Thematic Findings*

Table 2 Summary of Thematic Findings

Theme	Key Insight
Emotional Security	Promotes classroom participation and reduces dropout risk
Psychological Well-being	Enhances resilience, self-confidence, and academic perseverance
School Environment	Infrastructure and safety directly impact attendance and engagement
Family Dynamics	Emotional and financial support at home boosts learning motivation
Mental Health	Untreated conditions hinder learning and participation
Teacher & Peer Relationships	Supportive adults and inclusive peer groups foster emotional safety and growth

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the intricate relationship between children's well-being and their academic achievement, with a special focus on Madhepura district in Bihar, a region that typifies the challenges of rural education in India. Through an extensive review of national and international literature, it has become clear that well-being is not a luxury but a prerequisite for effective learning.

The findings strongly suggest that children's academic success is deeply intertwined with their emotional security, psychological resilience, school environment, mental health, and family dynamics. In Madhepura and similar under-resourced areas, poverty, neglect, lack of infrastructure, and social inequalities systematically erode the well-being of children, thereby impeding their learning potential.

While academic achievement is often measured by test scores, this study shows that such outcomes are only the tip of the iceberg. Beneath those scores lie complex emotional and psychological processes that either empower or obstruct a child's ability to learn. If the child is hungry, afraid, shamed, or unsupported, no amount of textbook content can result in meaningful learning.

### B. Key Findings

Based on the thematic review, the following core insights emerged:

- Children with emotional safety at school and home are more likely to engage and succeed academically.
- Psychological well-being, including self confidence and emotional regulation, directly impacts academic motivation and persistence.
- A supportive school environment clean classrooms, trained teachers, and friendly peers serves as a foundation for learning.
- Children exposed to trauma, stress, or neglect at home tend to underperform or disengage from school.
- Mental health support is virtually absent in rural schools like those in Madhepura, despite rising emotional needs.
- NEP 2020 and related policies offer hope, but implementation remains limited in remote areas due to a lack of resources and trained personnel.

### C. Recommendations

#### ➤ For Schools and Educators

- Establish school-based counselling services: Even one trained mental health professional per block can provide crucial support for children facing anxiety, depression, or trauma.
- Conduct emotional literacy programs: Introduce weekly life skills or emotional education sessions, as

suggested in NEP 2020, to build self-awareness and coping skills.

- Create safe and inclusive classrooms: Train teachers in positive discipline, gender sensitivity, and caste-neutral teaching to ensure all children feel valued.
- Improve school infrastructure: Basic facilities such as toilets, drinking water, playgrounds, and adequate lighting greatly affect children's sense of comfort and security.

#### ➤ For Families and Communities

- Promote awareness of child mental health: Encourage community level conversations to break the stigma around children's emotional needs.
- Support parental engagement: Schools should hold regular meetings and informal gatherings with parents to help them understand their role in promoting well-being.
- Discourage early marriage and child labour: Local panchayats, NGOs, and school leaders must actively advocate for the rights of children to continue their education.

#### ➤ For Government and Policymakers

- Implement NEP 2020 in full spirit: Provide funding and monitoring support to ensure that socio-emotional learning and child well-being become operational priorities in rural schools.
- Recruit and train local youth as well-being facilitators: Train educated youth in rural areas to act as para-counsellors or mentors for younger children.
- Integrate well-being indicators in educational monitoring: Beyond attendance and grades, include student happiness, emotional health, and school satisfaction as metrics in school evaluations.

#### ➤ For Researchers and Future Studies

- Conduct field-based qualitative research in Madhepura and similar districts to document the lived experiences of children, parents, and teachers.
- Explore gender-specific well-being challenges in rural education, especially concerning girls' mental health and aspirations.
- Develop rural-specific intervention models that are low-cost, community-based, and culturally relevant.

### D. Final Reflection

Children in rural India, like those in Madhepura, are no less capable or intelligent than their urban counterparts. What they often lack is emotional nourishment, mental health support, and educational spaces that make them feel safe and inspired. To truly improve academic achievement, we must begin by nurturing the whole child mind, heart, and soul.

This review-based study offers a starting point for rethinking rural education not just as a matter of literacy and schooling, but as a comprehensive system that

protects, empowers, and uplifts children through emotional and psychological support. When children are well, they learn well.

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