

THE IMPACT OF GRYD INTERVENTION FAMILY CASE MANAGEMENT (FCM) SERVICES ON INCREASING DECISION-MAKING INDEPENDENCE

Increases in decision-making independence led to a 34% reduction in GRYD FCM participants' involvement in crime.

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The GRYD Research Brief Series highlights the accomplishments of the GRYD Office and its community partners as they implement the GRYD Comprehensive Strategy! The current research brief builds on GRYD Research Brief No. 9, GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) Services: A Summary of Participants and Services, by exploring the impact of the GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) services. The core purpose of GRYD FCM services is to guide and support participants as they address difficult issues related to gang embeddedness that are often overlooked by other services. Ultimately, GRYD's goal is to empower participants and their families to make the decisions that lead to resilience, wellness, and thriving. GRYD FCM case managers and Community Intervention Workers (CIWs) offer participants a road map to enhance their resiliency and provide support as their journeys unfold. This brief provides valuable insight into this process and the impact it has on participants.

REGINALD ZACHERY

GRYD DIRECTOR



Providing gang intervention services to young people and emerging adults plays a major role in the GRYD Comprehensive Strategy and is provided through GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) services. GRYD FCM services blend street outreach and case management services to support participants as they reduce their gang embeddedness. In addition to meeting the basic needs of participants and connecting them to services, an essential part of GRYD FCM services is to help participants support decision-making consistent with their own best interest and well-being.² The purpose of this brief is to build on GRYD Research Brief No. 9, *GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) Services: A Summary of Participants and Services*, by examining the impact of GRYD FCM services on decision-making behavior, gang embeddedness, and involvement in crime.

GANG EMBEDDEDNESS AND DECISION-MAKING

The connection between gangs and violent crime is by now well established by decades of research.³⁻⁸ Gang-involved youth and emerging adults are not only responsible for a greater share of violent crime than their non-gang counterparts, but the level of violence also tends to be more serious. Group-level social processes are thought to enhance gang involvement through the development and reinforcement of social norms favoring violence; the supplanting of individual goals and interests with those of the group; the development of routine activities that increase exposure to opportunities for violence; and the suppression of self-control that might otherwise limit offending.⁹⁻¹¹

The extent to which individuals are aligned with and impacted by group norms is often captured in their level of "gang embeddedness."¹² At the extreme, immersion within the gang comes with strong social and emotional connections to other members of the group while simultaneously producing isolation from other non-deviant, prosocial networks (e.g., based in legitimate work, family, church). In turn, this dynamic limits one's ability to make decisions independently from that of the group.¹³ Over the short-term, immersion in the gang potentially changes one's normative orientation leading to an increased importance of collective identity; a more pronounced role for reputational and status conflicts; and an increased exposure to criminal and delinquent opportunities through distinctive routine activity patterns.¹⁰ Over the intermediate-term, immersion within the gang may impair social-developmental processes associated with the normal transition from adolescence to adulthood, including taking on greater responsibilities in life and work and succeeding in those domains.¹⁴ Over the long-term, the trajectories for gang-involved young people and emerging adults frequently involves poor performance in school, unstable employment, fractured family life, and increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system.^{8,15-17}

Gang embeddedness is a dynamic phenomenon. Although involvement in crime tends to increase as embeddedness increases, reductions in embeddedness can promote desistance and greatly reduce future involvement in crime.^{14,18} This variability makes gang embeddedness a desirable and tangible target for GRYD FCM services.

THE GRYD INTERVENTION FAMILY CASE MANAGEMENT (FCM) APPROACH

In 2011, the GRYD Office adopted several tenets of family systems theory to build a conceptual framework for the delivery of GRYD Prevention and Intervention FCM services.¹⁹ Family systems theory views individuals within the context of family and social systems and encourages individuals to understand their functioning within these systems, while also self-differentiating their decision-making and actions from them.^{20,21} This theory of self-differentiation was incorporated into GRYD FCM services as a vehicle for addressing the level of

fusion between participants and their affiliated gang (i.e., gang embeddedness). Borrowing from family systems theory, the gang is considered an emotional unit with individuals bound together via emotional interdependencies.²⁰ The actions taken by any one individual within the gang profoundly affect others within the gang, impacting their perceptions of the world and subsequent decisions. The magnitude of these effects is dependent upon the strength of the emotional ties between the individual and the group.

Bowen's family systems theory also asserts that less differentiated/more embedded persons are more emotionally reactive, have greater difficulty thinking under stress, and are less able to maintain a sense of self in close relationships and decision-making.²⁰ By extension, individuals with a lower level of self-differentiation are more prone to lose their sense of self in response to the pressures and norms of the group. The extrapolation of these theoretical principles into GRYD FCM practice translates into helping gang-involved young people and emerging adults build and support self-differentiation from the gang by (1) building a sense of self-efficacy and decision-making independence and (2) transferring their attachments to prosocial networks and activities.

In general, GRYD FCM services support participant self-differentiation through the delivery of a multi-phased program that includes GRYD provider staff team meetings, individual participant meetings, and participant family meetings (see GRYD Research Brief No. 9 for a detailed overview of FCM services). GRYD FCM case managers and Community Intervention Workers (CIWs) work together to provide case management, intervention outreach support, service referrals, general counseling, and skill building to enhance participants' capacity for decision-making independence.²² They help participants locate and/or apply for "work ready" documents, such as birth certificates, social security cards, and driver's licenses; provide life skill training; provide advocacy at court hearings and with criminal justice agencies; and facilitate access to critical services, such as mental health and substance abuse counseling, tattoo removal, and so on. Throughout services and support, self-differentiation or decision-making independence is emphasized by encouraging participants to identify and apply solutions to problems and to engage in activities that foster their strengths.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this brief is to explore whether GRYD FCM services reduce involvement in crime by increasing self-differentiation through decision-making independence and reducing gang embeddedness.

It is important to consider the role that impulsive risk-taking (i.e., low self-control) may play in mediating the relationships between self-differentiation, gang embeddedness, and crime. Low self-control may play some role in why young people join gangs in the first place. A long-standing hypothesis is that gangs differentially attract those with high levels of low self-control, producing social groups that are more likely to engage in crime by virtue of their impulsiveness alone.²³ Current evidence suggests that there is some self-selection into gangs based on self-control, but more importantly that gang involvement appears to push impulsive risk-taking higher!¹ In either case, low self-control generally acts as a final filter or check on offending behavior. Two young people with the same degree of gang embeddedness and same level of decision-making independence may nevertheless differ in their capacity to resist the same crime opportunity. For example, when faced with the opportunity to commit a crime, a young person with a predisposition to impulsive risk-taking may be more likely to commit the crime than a young person with higher levels of self-control.

We can represent the relationships between decision-making independence, gang embeddedness, impulsive risk-taking, and involvement in crime as a "network of influences" (Figure 1). Decision-making independence may impact involvement in crime directly. The more self-differentiated an individual is, for instance, the more likely they will make decisions consistent with their long-term interest, which includes foregoing opportunities to commit crime. However, the impact of decision-making independence on crime may be blocked or attenuated by impulsiveness. A tempting opportunity may lead an individual to offend, even if they recognize it is not in their long-term interest. The impact of decision-making independence on involvement in crime may also be blocked or attenuated by their gang embeddedness when the interests of the gang supersede self-interest.

This study seeks to test the following hypotheses to determine whether GRYD FCM services increase decision-making independence and decrease participants' involvement:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Participating in GRYD FCM services will increase decision-making independence.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Increases in decision-making independence will decrease crime involvement.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Increases in decision-making independence will reduce gang embeddedness and impulsivity, thereby limiting the direct impact of these factors on crime involvement.



Figure 1: Predicted Relationship between Key Concepts Driving GRYD FCM Services

DATA AND METHODS

Our analyses rely on information collected by GRYD using the Social Embeddedness Tool (SET)²² The SET is an assessment tool used to measure an individual's gang embeddedness, attitudinal risks and strengths, and self-reported involvement in crime at the time of intake into the program. The SET is re-administered approximately every six months to all participants enrolled in services. This study uses SET data collected at intake and at the first retest after six months of services between December 13, 2013 and January 29, 2021. Analyses were restricted to SET data containing both an intake and a retest, resulting in a combined total of 3,128 SET Intake and Retest surveys completed by 1,564 unique participants. Figure 2 displays the demographics of these GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) participants. Approximately one-quarter (28%) of the participants were Black and 70% were Latino/a. Most participants were male, but just under half were female. The average age at intake for participants was 18.4 years (19.0 at retest)²²

Measures for the current analyses were drawn from SET questions designed to elicit information about attitudinal characteristics, social relationships, and behaviors. Responses for specific questions were combined to create scales, or latent measures, representing decision-making independence, gang embeddedness, impulsiveness, and involvement in crime. Table 1 provides definitions for each of the key measures (see Appendix A for a list of SET items used to measure each variable).

Structural equation models (SEMs) were used to test the "network of influences" on crime involvement for GRYD FCM participants at intake and six months later at retest. These statistical models statistically characterize the nature (sign and magnitude) of the measures and their pathways, and the comparison across time allows us to identify whether there were significant changes between intake and retest for any of the key measures and their pathways.²⁴

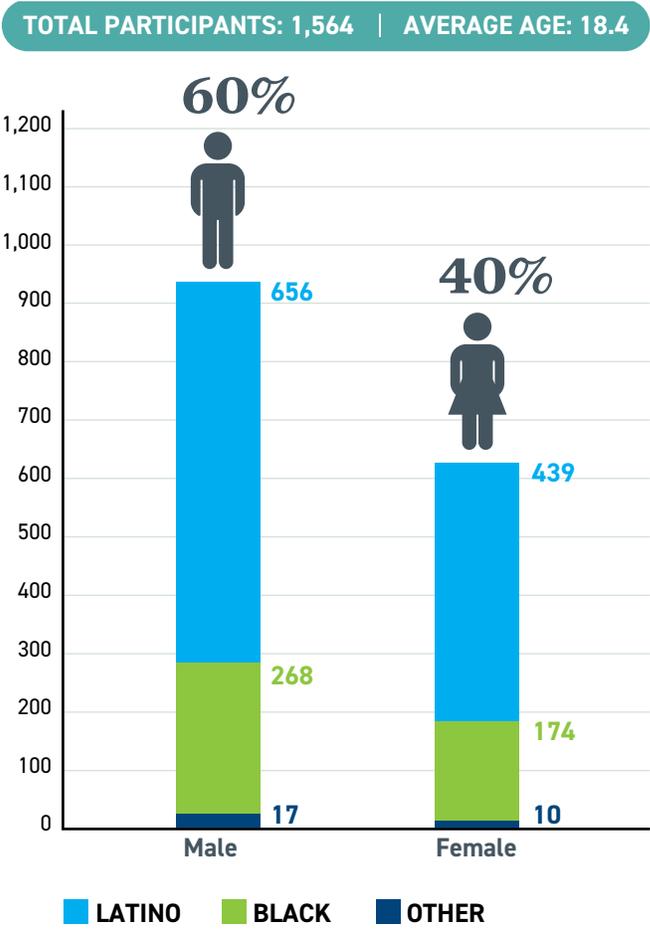


Figure 2. GRYD FCM participants by race-ethnicity and gender.

Table 1: Descriptions of and Items Used for Key Measures

TARGETED MEASURE	DESCRIPTION OF MEASURE
Decision-making independence	Ability to make decisions in one's own self-interest independent of their social groups (i.e., self-differentiation)
Gang embeddedness	Participants' emotional ties to their gangs
Impulsive risk-taking	Attitudes that favor short-term gains over long-term consequences (i.e., low self-control)
Involvement in crime	Level of involvement in violent and non-violent crime

RESULTS

PRIOR TO RECEIVING GRYD FCM SERVICES.

At intake, higher decision-making independence had no direct impact on crime involvement, but it had a modest and statistically significant effect on reducing impulsive risk-taking and gang

embeddedness. As predicted, higher levels of impulsive risk-taking and gang embeddedness increased crime involvement (see Figure 3).



*Statistically significant at $p < .05$

Figure 3: Relationship between Key Concepts Prior to GRYD FCM Services

AFTER RECEIVING SIX MONTHS OF GRYD FCM SERVICES

Between intake and retest, GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) participants experienced an average increase of 2% in decision-making independence, while gang embeddedness decreased 14% and impulsive risk-taking decreased 12% (see Table 2). A reduction in crime paralleled the changes in decision-making independence, gang embeddedness,

and impulsive risk-taking. On average, GRYD FCM services reduced participant involvement in crime by an average of 34% between intake and retest, whereas participants self-reported involvement in an average of 1.47 violent and property crimes at intake, they self-reported 0.97 events at retest.

Table 2. Summary of changes: average responses derived from the GRYD SET questionnaire.

TARGETED MEASURE	INTAKE MEAN	RETEST MEAN	PERCENT CHANGE
Decision-making independence*	3.55	3.63	2% ↑
Gang embeddedness*	3.68	3.16	-14% ↓
Impulsive risk-taking*	2.92	2.58	-12% ↓
Involvement in crime*	1.47 events	0.97 events	-34% ↓

*Scales were scored using a 5-point scale with 1 indicating low levels of the measure and 5 indicating very high levels of the measure. Findings are statistically significant at $p < .05$



*Statistically significant at $p < .05$

Figure 4: Relationship between Key Concepts After GRYD FCM Services

When the relationship between these key measures was examined using structural decision-making equations, the predicted relationships were supported. Increases in decision-making independence significantly decreased the levels of impulsive risk-taking, gang embeddedness, and crime involvement. Additionally, the strength of the relationships between both impulsive risk-taking and crime and gang embeddedness and crime were reduced and statistically significant; thus, decision-making independence reduced crime involvement directly and indirectly.

Figure 5 calculates the overall indirect effect of decision-making independence on crime involvement. Higher decision-making independence is associated with lower gang emotional embeddedness and lower impulsive risk-taking, and both mediating factors show a weaker relationship with involvement in crime after participation in GRYD FCM services. Specifically, decision-making independence decreased the influence of impulsive risk-taking on crime involvement at retest by 51%, and decision-making independence decreased the influence of gang embeddedness on crime involvement at retest by 41%.

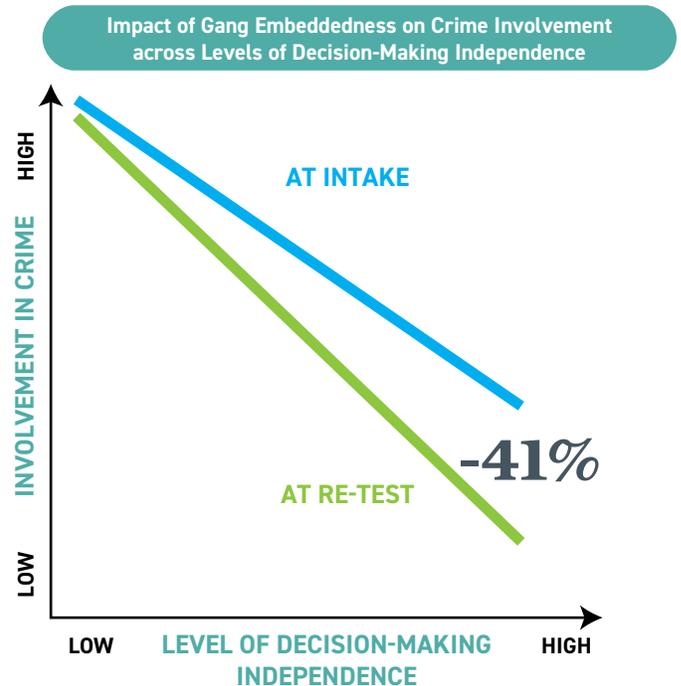
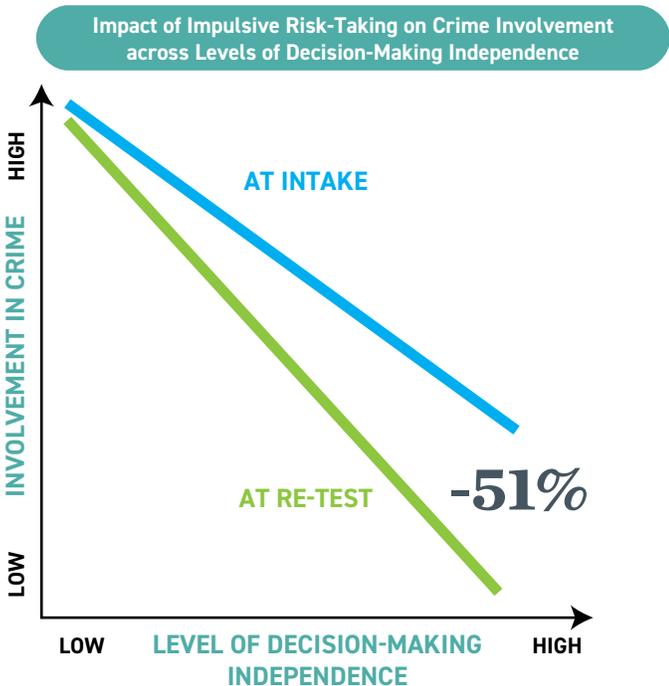


Figure 5. The Effect of Decision-Making Independence through Impulsive Risk-Taking and Gang Embeddedness on Involvement in Crime

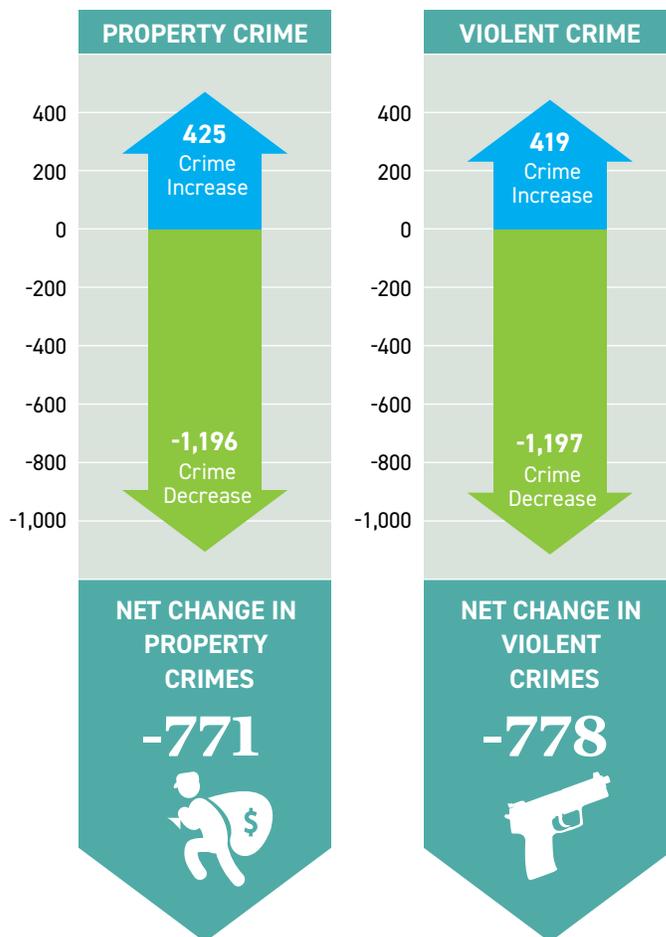
These findings are consistent with the intended goals of GRYD FCM services and provide support for all three hypotheses proposed in the current brief:

- Participating in GRYD FCM services increased decision-making independence (Hypothesis 1).
- Increases in decision-making independence at retest directly reduced crime involvement (Hypothesis 2).
- Increases in decision-making independence reduced gang embeddedness and impulsive risk-taking, which in turn, reduced their impact on crime involvement (Hypothesis 3).

THE IMPACT OF GRYD FCM SERVICES ON CRIME AND VIOLENCE

GRYD FCM participants self-report their involvement in property and violent crime at intake and retest. Based on these data, GRYD FCM participants as a group reported committing overall 771 fewer property and 778 fewer violent crimes (see Figure 6).

Unfortunately, the distribution of these crime reductions across specific crime types within these two categories is not known; however, if we use historical data showing, for example, that 10% of violent crimes city-wide are aggravated assaults, city-wide proportions can be used to estimate the categories of crimes most impacted by reductions. For the top five property crimes and the top five violent crimes, it is estimated that GRYD FCM services may have contributed to 310 fewer burglaries (car and structure), 163 fewer car thefts, 162 fewer petty thefts, and 136 fewer vandalisms. Based on the top five violent crime types, the reported violent crime reductions may reflect 437 fewer simple assaults (domestic and non-domestic), 152 fewer aggravated assaults, 119 fewer robberies, and 71 fewer criminal threats of violence. These numbers produce not only an improvement in public safety and community wellness but also translates into an estimated fiscal savings of \$6.1 million in prevented property crimes (\$2.9 million within the criminal justice system alone) and \$10.1 million in prevented violent crime (\$4.1 million within the criminal justice system alone).



*Scales were scored using a 5-point scale with 1 indicating low levels of the measure and 5 indicating very high levels of the measure.

Figure 6. Change in the number of self-reported crimes committed between SET intake and retest.

SUMMARY

The findings presented in this brief provide strong evidence that GRYD Intervention Family Case Management (FCM) services help participants strengthen their ability to make choices that are aligned with their own positive self-interest and weaken the negative influences of gang embeddedness and impulsive risk-taking. Consequently, participating in GRYD FCM services is associated with substantial reductions in self-reported property and violent crime. On average, participants who received GRYD FCM services saw their involvement in property and violent crime reduced by 34%. This is accompanied by substantial improvements in both decision-making independence (i.e., self-differentiation) and substantial reductions in gang embeddedness (i.e., emotional ties to the gang), and impulsive risk-taking (i.e., self-control). The impact of GRYD FCM services is not only significant for the well-being of participants but also for community safety and wellness. Although the impact on the lives of participants and their families is difficult to quantify, even small improvements can have large and long-lasting effects. The current study showed that GRYD FCM services was responsible for up to 771 fewer property crimes and 778 fewer violent crimes among the 1,564 participants included in this study. Such findings demonstrate that investing in the community to restore and support those involved in gangs produces a significant return on investment at many levels.²

It is important to recognize a key study limitation. The participants who enroll in GRYD FCM do not represent a random sample of gang-involved young people and emerging adults, nor does GRYD currently have access to an equivalent comparison group; thus, the current study is based on a pre/post comparison of the treatment group without a comparison. This raises “validity threat” concerns—for example, the GRYD FCM participants may be more ready for change in their lives than the young people who did not enroll in services. This underscores the recognition that GRYD FCM services are available to help people reach for something different from themselves, not to achieve scientific goals. Nonetheless, these findings capture significant achievements for GRYD FCM participants that directly translate into increased well-being for themselves and their communities.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Appendix: Descriptions of and Items Used for Key Measures

TARGETED MEASURE	DESCRIPTION OF MEASURE	#SET ITEMS	ITEMS COMBINED TO OPERATIONALIZE MEASURE
Decision-making independence	Ability to make decisions in one's own self-interest independent of their social groups (i.e., self-differentiation)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do what I think is right even if [GROUP] does not want me to do it. • I care more about doing what I think is right than doing what [GROUP] wants me to do. • I can say 'no' to my [GROUP] even when I feel pressured by them. • I easily ignore [GROUP]'s advice when I don't agree with them.
Gang embeddedness	Participants' emotional ties to their gangs	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you likely to retaliate if a member of [GROUP] was hurt by someone? • If [GROUP] was disrespected, would you speak out and defend your [GROUP]? • If you saw someone from [GROUP] get jumped, would you defend them? • If [GROUP] was insulted by someone, what is the most that you would do about it?
Impulsive risk-taking	Attitudes that favor short-term gains over long-term consequences (i.e., low self-control)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement and adventure are more important to me than safety. • I like to have fun when I can even if I will get in trouble for it later. • I often do things without stopping to think if I will get into trouble. • Sometimes I like to do something dangerous just for the fun of it.
Involvement in crime	Level of involvement in violent and non-violent crime	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of criminal acts in the past 6 months. • The total number of violent acts in the past 6 months.

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