

Is domestic work a professional work? Perception of domestic care in 20 countries

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Introduction

The social and economic transformations that have characterized our time have influenced the way family-work interface is organized. New work dynamics as well as new care needs influence how individuals perceive domestic chores¹ and the developing and performing of the different home-making skills.

Men and women alike tend to describe domestic chores as tedious, boring and less challenging when comparing them with working tasks outside the home. Yet tending to one's basic needs and to the ones around us is of vital importance and impact life sustainability and family and life satisfaction in different ways². At the same time, individual's perception is affected in turn by the perception and beliefs that communities hold in regards to those tasks and skills³.

¹ Cfr. V.A. FREEDMAN, J.C. CORNMAN, & D. Carr, *Is spousal caregiving associated with enhanced well-being? New evidence from the panel study of income dynamics*, "Journals of Gerontology" Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, (2014) doi:10.1093/geronb/gbu004

² Cfr. N. CHESLEY & S. FLOOD, *Signs of Change? At-Home and Breadwinner Parents' Housework and Child-Care Time*. "Family Relations". (2016) doi:10.1111/jomf.12376

³ Cfr. M. BLAIR-LOY, A. HOCHSCHILD, A. PUGH, J. WILLIAMS & H. HARTMANN, *Stability and transformation in gender, work, and family: insights from the second shift for the next quarter century*, "Community, Work & Family", (2015) 435-454. Published online: 08 Oct 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2015.1080664>. M. DOMINGUEZ-FOLGUERAST, JURADO-GUERRERO, C. BOTIA-MORILLAS & P. AMIGOT-LEACHE *'The house belongs to both': undoing the gendered division of housework*, "Community, Work & Family", (2016) Published online: 08 Jun 2016 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2016.1192525> E. KOSSEK, *Capturing social and cultural influences: relating individual work-life experiences to context*. "Community,

Domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for the sick and elders are unpaid work activities that in today's hectic working schedules are experienced as a heavy burden for the ones that have to balance work and life turning them into the so called 'second shift'. For the ones that can afford it these tasks are outsourced becoming an occupation for the least skilled labor force or migrants⁴; others decide to dedicate themselves fully to these activities in order to preserve the well-being of the family. Moreover, these same scenarios tend to repeat themselves in the different countries and cultures. A paradox seems to appear. On one hand, domestic work is vital to human well-being; on the other hand, the perception of the work itself and the persons that perform it come across as low⁵. From this paradox, several questions arise regarding domestic work. At a social and anthropological level, one could ask, is it important? Does it add value to human life? Does it develop useful skills? Does it influence society's well-being? Why would you dedicate yourself fully to attend to these chores? The present study tries to answer some of these questions. To our knowledge there has been little research focused on analyzing the perception of domestic work among the members of the family and across countries. This research aims to:

1. Determine the perception of domestic chores in the 20 countries included in the study.

Work and Family", (2015) 371-376. Published online: 08 Oct 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2015.1081506>

⁴ J.C. TRONTO, *The "Nanny" Question in Feminism*, "Hypatia", 17 (2002) 34-51.

⁵ B. ANDERSON, *A Very Private Business*, "European Journal of Women's Studies", 14 (3) (2007) 247-264. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350506807079013>
Nutzungsbedingungen. E. GREENWOOD, (1957). *Attributes of a Profession*. In Kitch, W. A. (ed.) *Role of the Design Professional in Society*. University Readers, 2010, pp. 65-74.

2. Identify time allocation for domestic work across gender in the countries studied.
3. Establish how the perception of professional success compares to the complete dedication to tend to domestic chores in the different countries.
4. Identify the motivation of the persons that fully dedicate themselves to domestic chores in the different countries.

Review of literature

As mentioned in the introduction new work and social dynamics have brought about changes in the way men and women handle their domestic practices. The constant blending realms of work and life present new challenges to our daily routines. Household members need to eat, get their laundry done, clean up their living quarters (occasionally, at least); children and infirmed adults require special attention too. These needs do not disappear; what become scarce are the persons performing the work to fulfill those care needs and when and how to do it.

As England, Budig & Folbre define, care work refers to the provision of any face-to-face or hands-on service that develops the human capabilities of the recipient⁶. These human capabilities refer to “health, skills, or proclivities that are useful to oneself or others. These include physical and mental health, physical skills, cognitive skills, and emotional skills, such as self-discipline, empathy, and care.” (p. 455)

Domestic work activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening, etc. are care work. Moreover, care work can be paid or unpaid. Unpaid care work is usually the one that takes place at home, and is performed by family members or friends: the most time-intensive example of unpaid care work is parenting. Paid care work will include the

⁶ P. ENGLAND, M. BUDIG & N. FOLBRE, *Wages of Virtue: The Relative Pay of Care Work*, “Social Problems”, 49 (4) (2002) 455-473.

hiring of someone else to perform the afore mentioned activities. Academic interest in care started with gerontologists and child development scholars who focus on the recipients of care. Later on, and lead by feminist scholars, interest shifted towards the nature of the work, those who performed care work and its relationship to gender and social inequality. More recent academic work has centered on the neoliberal move of care to the market and commoditized care into the family; the cultural and economic undervaluation of care labor; the structural positioning of care workers (according gender, ethnic, nationality and skills) within local and global labor markets and the transnationalizations of care work⁷.

England's review of care work theories⁸ (2005) highlights five theoretical frameworks developed to conceptualize care work. The "devaluation perspective" argues that care work is badly rewarded because care is associated with women, and often women of color. The "public good" framework points out that care work provides benefits far beyond those to the direct recipient and suggests that the low pay of care work is a special case of the failure of markets to reward public goods. The "prisoner of love" theory argues that the intrinsic caring motives of care workers allow employers to more easily get away with paying care workers less. The "commodification of emotion" framework focuses on emotional harm to workers when they have to sell services that use an intimate part of themselves. Finally, "love and money" perspective argues against dichotomous views in which markets are seen as antithetical to true care.

⁷ S. HUANG, *Care Work*. "The International Encyclopedia of Geography". Edited by Douglas Richardson, Noel Castree, Michael F. Goodchild, Audrey Kobayashi, Weidong Liu, and Richard A. Marston. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017. DOI: 10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0127

⁸ P. ENGLAND, *Emerging theories of Care Work*, "Annual Review of Sociology", 31 (2005) 381-399. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.31.041304.122317.

Considering the scope and objectives of this research, we are especially interested in two of these frameworks: the devaluation perspective and the public good theory.

Devaluation of Care Work

This perspective argues that cultural biases limit wages and state support for care work because of its association with women⁹. The supporters of this perspective hold that cultural ideas deprecate women and thus, by cognitive association, devalue work typically done by women. This rationale would explain why the predominantly female occupations pay less than male dominated fields, affecting both men and female in those occupations, but since there are more women working there, this heavily influences the gender pay gap¹⁰(Cohen & Huffman, 2003).

Some argue that female-dominated jobs involving care are especially devalued, because “care is the quintessentially female-identified activity”¹¹. Moreover, as Green and Lawson¹² underline care work enters the commoditization game with a handicap: its association with women and domesticity. This happens because there is the cultural assumption that, for example, caring for the home and household members is somehow work deemed ‘natural’ for women to perform. Data from around the world confirms that women perform more unpaid care work than men, although in developed countries

⁹ P. ENGLAND, *Emerging theories of Care Work*, “Annual Review of Sociology”, 31 (2005) 381-399. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.31.041304.122317.

¹⁰ P. COHEN & M. L. HUFFMAN, *Occupational segregation and the devaluation of women's work across US labor markets*, “Social Forces”, 81 (3) (2003) 881 - 908.

¹¹ F. M. CANCIAN & S. J. OLIKER, *Caring and Gender*, Thousand Oaks; Pine Forge, 2000. P. ENGLAND, M. BUDIG & N. FOLBRE, *Wages of Virtue: The Relative Pay of Care Work*, “Social Problems”, 49 (4) (2002) 455-473. A. LEVANON, P. ENGLAND & P. ALLISON, *Occupational feminization and pay: Assessing causal dynamics using 1950-2000 census data*, “Social Forces”, 88 (2009) 865-92.

¹² M. GREEN & V. LAWSON, *Recentring care: interrogating the commodification of care*, “Social & Cultural Geography”, 12 (6) (2011) 639-654. Dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.601262

the number of hours women spend in unpaid care work has decreased drastically, it still surpasses that of men. Interestingly enough, the 'naturalization' of care work implies that little or no specific skills or knowledge are needed to perform this work and that it is done out of love and obligation. Thus care work not only pay less than other jobs but also less than other women's jobs with similar skill levels that do not involve care¹³.

England¹⁴ argues that other sign that the devaluation of care work due to its association with female work still prevails is that the number of males entering female dominated professions and fields is smaller than the number of women entering male dominated realms. The economic incentives for them to undertake work in women's professions simply do not exist. However, it is not just the lack of economic incentives that keep men from crossing the line into women's jobs, there is also the cultural backlash and disapproval they receive when daring to trespass gender boundaries.

One other point that supports this devaluation perspective is that the same activities involve in domestic care when perform outside the private realm of the home are better paid and receive higher social recognition. It is not surprising then that society would perceive that domestic work, the caring for the home, is not as important as other occupations. Yet, as we will see in the next theoretical perspective, care work might have more social benefits than other types of work.

Care work within the public good framework

The other framework that we would like to look at is the one called the public good framework. Scholars argue that paid and unpaid care work have more indirect social benefits than other types of work. This means that there is a high number of people

¹³ P. ENGLAND, M. BUDIG & N. FOLBRE, *Wages of Virtue: The Relative Pay of Care Work*, "Social Problems", 49 (4) (2002) 455-473.

¹⁴ P. ENGLAND, *The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled*, "Gender & Society", 24 (2) (2010) 149-166. DOI: 10.1177/0891243210361475

who cannot be excluded from the indirect benefits that paid and unpaid care work produce, thus turning care work in a public good. Coleman¹⁵ argues that society has an interest in how well parents do the job of parenting, because they can turn into net benefit or drag on society. Folbre¹⁶ also asserts that having and rearing children benefit people in society other than the children themselves. England¹⁷ poses that “at issue is not only how care imbues cognitive skills that increase earnings, but more broadly that receiving care also helps recipients develop skills, values, and habits that benefit themselves and others (p.385)”. “Benefits” continues England “to all the indirect recipients accrue because care workers help develop the capabilities of direct beneficiaries, and these beneficiaries spread them through social interaction (p. 386)”¹⁸. Within this perspective, the importance of caring for the home grows since this work would help develop human capabilities that in turn will aid in the growth of those around.

However, unpaid care work is time and energy consuming. Therefore, with the main care provider, now working outside the home, but still performing most of the care work inside the home, women face a heavy burden. Studies of allocation of time show that working hours for women including paid and unpaid work have increased. This increase in turn have implications for personal health and the development of human capabilities. They are also relevant to subjective assessments of well-being such as the

¹⁵ J. S. COLEMAN, *The rational reconstruction of society*, “American Sociological Review”, 58 (1993) 1-15.

¹⁶ N. FOLBRE, *Children as public goods*, “American Economic Review”, 84 (1994) 86-90. N. FOLBRE, *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*, New Press, New York, 2001.

¹⁷ P. ENGLAND, *Emerging theories of Care Work*, “Annual Review of Sociology”, 31 (2005) 381-399. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.31.041304.122317.

¹⁸ Ibid,

level of stress or feeling of being rushed¹⁹. As Folbre²⁰ suggests the allocation of women's time "affects their ability to develop their own capabilities — and that of their children. It also affects their relative standard of living, as measured by national income statistics" (p. 185). It is not only time allocation that is at stake in unpaid care work; energy to perform those tasks is also required. Becker²¹ indicates that household activities are high energy consuming affecting therefore the amount of energy that women have left to allocate to other activities. The same restraints affect men who want to dedicate time to household work. Folbre²² states the dichotomy: "Care imposes costs in the form of financial obligations, lost opportunities and foregone wages- but it also generates intrinsic rewards, stronger family and social ties, and high quality services for the dependents." (p. 184).

However, as any other social or cultural criteria, the organizing of care is dependent of the bigger cultural context from which it stems. Different societies with different social-economic situations and political institutions might organize the provision of care differently, therefore affecting the way domestic care is lived and experienced. For example, in Latin American countries, the high level of labor informality makes organizing care through legislation or by offering care services at the workplace almost

¹⁹ G. FERRANT, L. M. PESANDO & K. NOWACKA, *Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*. OECD Development Centre, December 2014. M. McDONALD, S. PHIPPS & L. LETHBRIDGE, 'Taking its toll': the influence of paid and unpaid work on women's well-being, "Feminist Economics", 11(1) (2005) 63–94.

²⁰ N. FOLBRE, *Measuring Care: Gender, Empowerment, and the Care Economy*, "Journal of Human Development", 7 (2) (2006) 183-199.

²¹ G. BECKER, *Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor*, "Journal of Labor Economics", 3 (1) (1985) S33-S58, Part 2: Trends in Women's Work, Education, and Family Building.

²² N. FOLBRE, *Measuring Care: Gender, Empowerment, and the Care Economy*, "Journal of Human Development", 7 (2) (2006) 183-199.

impossible and of little impact²³ (Rodriguez, 2012). On the other hand, there are countries like the United Kingdom or those from the European Union, where, as Anderson²⁴ points out, the question of demand for migrant domestic labor “fits within the broader European policy debate concerned with ageing, labor markets and care, and raises key questions about the contribution that migrant women make to the EU” (p. 248). Different contexts, different ways, different experiences of care.

Face with these views that frame domestic care, the present study sets forth to identify the perception of domestic work in 20 countries: who does it, how important it is and how it compares to professional success outside the home, what motivates those who choose to dedicate fully to unpaid domestic care.

Sample and Methodology

The sample includes 5000 participants from 20 countries (250 for each country): Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain, The Philippines, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uruguay. Forty percent of the participants were male and 60% were female, ages 25-65 (average age was 41), with family responsibilities.

Data was collected through an on-line questionnaire developed specifically for this study. In order to develop this instrument, 50 experts from 37 countries on all the continents were interviewed. It included opinions from different professions that

²³ C. RODRIGUEZ, *Work-Family Balance Issues in Latin America: A Roadmap to National Care Systems*. Paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on “Good Practices in Family Policy Making: Family Policy Development, Monitoring and Implementation: Lessons Learnt”, organized by The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 15-17 May 2012.

²⁴ B. ANDERSON, *A Very Private Business*, “European Journal of Women's Studies”, 14 (3) (2007) 247-264. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1350506807079013>
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influence the different sectors of society (public, private, academic, NGOs and media). The common content that arose from the interviews was used to establish the indicators that would be object of the data survey in all countries and the quantitative tool of this research was designed based on it. The questionnaire includes three main sections: 1) General perception of housework; 2) Components of homemaking: a) Organization and coordination of the home; b) Teaching values to children involved in homemaking; and 3) Link to work and relationship with household tasks. For this study, three items of the first section and the relationship with household tasks from the third section will be used. (www.globalhomeindex.org to access the whole questionnaire)

We asked participants to answer different items regarding the research objectives. Each item consisted of a five-point scale (1 = completely disagree, to 5 = completely agree).

The participants in the study answered the following statements:

- 1) I consider important to look after household tasks
- 2) Society values professional success outside the home above looking after the home
- 3) How many hours per week you spend on household tasks

To identify the type of motivation that leads to participants to dedicate fully to taking of the home we used a different type of inquiry. For this objective, they were presented with three different case scenarios describing the way they could relate to domestic work: Case A (centered in being resigned to the situation), Case B (assuming it as a temporary situation), and Case C (centered on intrinsic motivation). Participants had to indicate how much they identify with each of the cases on a scale from 0 to 3, where 0 was “nothing like me” and 3 was “very much like me”.

Three one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were performed in order to study the differences in 1. Society’s perception of professional success compare to successful

home making, 2. Level of importance attributed to household tasks, and 3. How many hours, men and women spend on household tasks across the 20 countries. For the fourth objective a descriptive analysis of percentage was performed. The case scenarios are presented in Appendix A.

Results and Discussion

Results show that there are significant differences in the perception of performing domestic chores across the different countries [$F(19, 4555) = 12.17, p < .001$]. There is also significant statistical differences among countries when comparing professional success to dedication to domestic work and which one is valued more [$F(19, 4555) = 11.42, p < .001$]. Nevertheless, the majority in all 20 countries agree that society values more professional success rather than successful homemaking. Time allocation for domestic work among gender also varies. Women in all countries appear to dedicate more time to these chores [$F(91, 4535) = 60.11, p < .001$]. They spend between 14 – 23 hours per week performing household tasks, while men spend between 6 – 16 hours per week (Figure 1).

In general, these results confirm previous findings regarding the low social esteem that domestic work receives in the different countries, as compare to professional success. However, when looking at the importance of looking after household chores then a crucial paradox arises because participants recognize that for them is important to look after household tasks. The devaluation perspective helps us explain the results of the perception that society values professional success more than successful home making, and viewing domestic care as a public good helps us to explain why participants place great importance to look after household tasks. The differences among countries also reflect how social and cultural contexts influence perceptions and behaviors.

When looking at the type of motivation participants have for fully dedicating to caring for the home we used the 22% of the total sample that answered that they did this. The other 78% combine full or part-time work outside the home. Results show that these participants (full dedication to the home) are intrinsic motivated: they do it to support and serve their loved ones (percentages vary between 36% and 81% between the different countries; it applies particularly in the United States where it is 81% and the Philippines where it is 76%). Very few participants that dedicate fully to domestic work do it because they 'had no choice' or do not have any other working qualification (0% and 15%). However, 5% - 44% of people see that they undertake household tasks as part of a transition in their lives until family or individual circumstances change. Lastly, between 12 % - 39% of participants identified with two of these ways of viewing household tasks (cfr. Figure 2). If we recall, the definition of care as "provision of any face-to-face or hands-on service that develops the human capabilities of the recipient²⁵"; it makes sense that the persons that decide to dedicate themselves fully to caring for the home, would do it out of the gratification they get from helping their loved ones to develop those human capabilities.

Further research paths might entail looking for differences among age groups in the different countries as well as men and women within those age groups. Literature suggest that older and younger men, for example, differ in how they view their role in the house and in relationship to parenting.

On the other hand, the paradox of considering housework important but perceiving that society values professional success more calls for actions that makes the importance of caring for the home visible. One of the actions that different countries are taking

²⁵ P. ENGLAND, M. BUDIG & N. FOLBRE, *Wages of Virtue: The Relative Pay of Care Work*, "Social Problems", 49 (4) (2002) 455-473.

towards a better visibility of domestic work is that of collecting data of the time spent in those activities in order to quantify their contribution towards the GDP. The Global Home Index is also another way of collecting data that will allow designing better ways of determining the value attached to domestic work.

Other possible way for gaining visibility and social recognition for housework is to identify and demonstrate the level of skills and competencies that are needed to perform the different tasks. The skills and abilities to carry out domestic work are not inherent to the person, man or woman: there is a learning process that helps develop those skills at the minimum level required. As a society, we must be willing to accept this reality and to compensate it as it is done with other activities, especially those that directly influence the skills development of other human beings.

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Figure 1

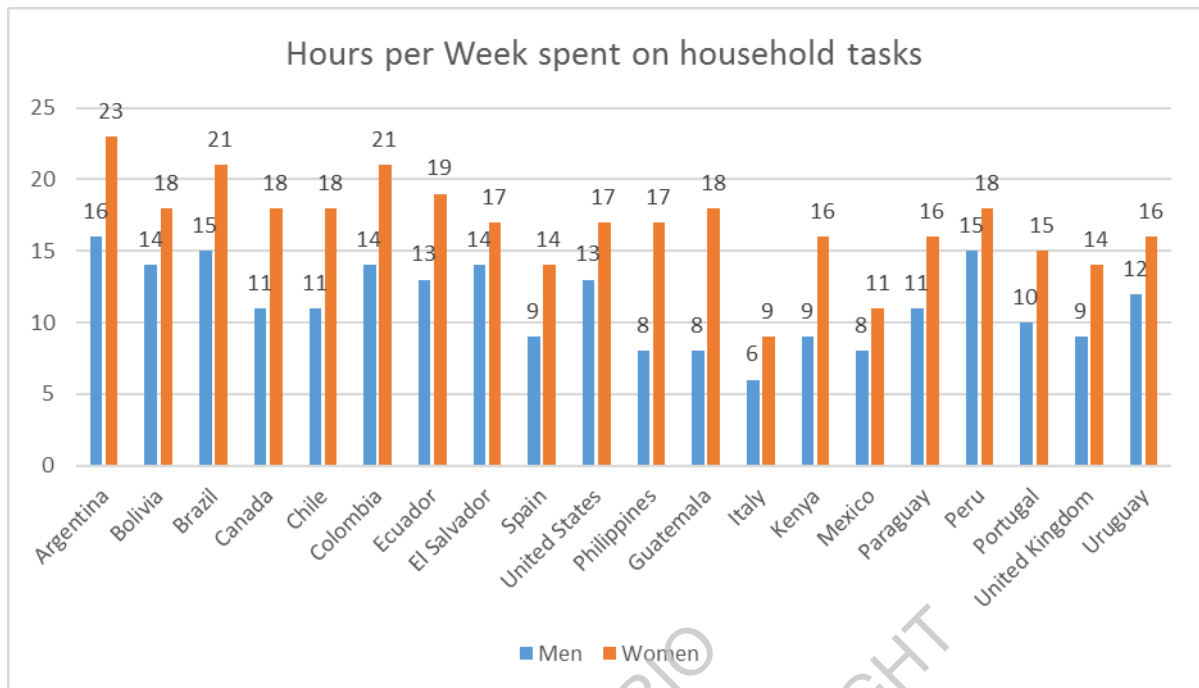
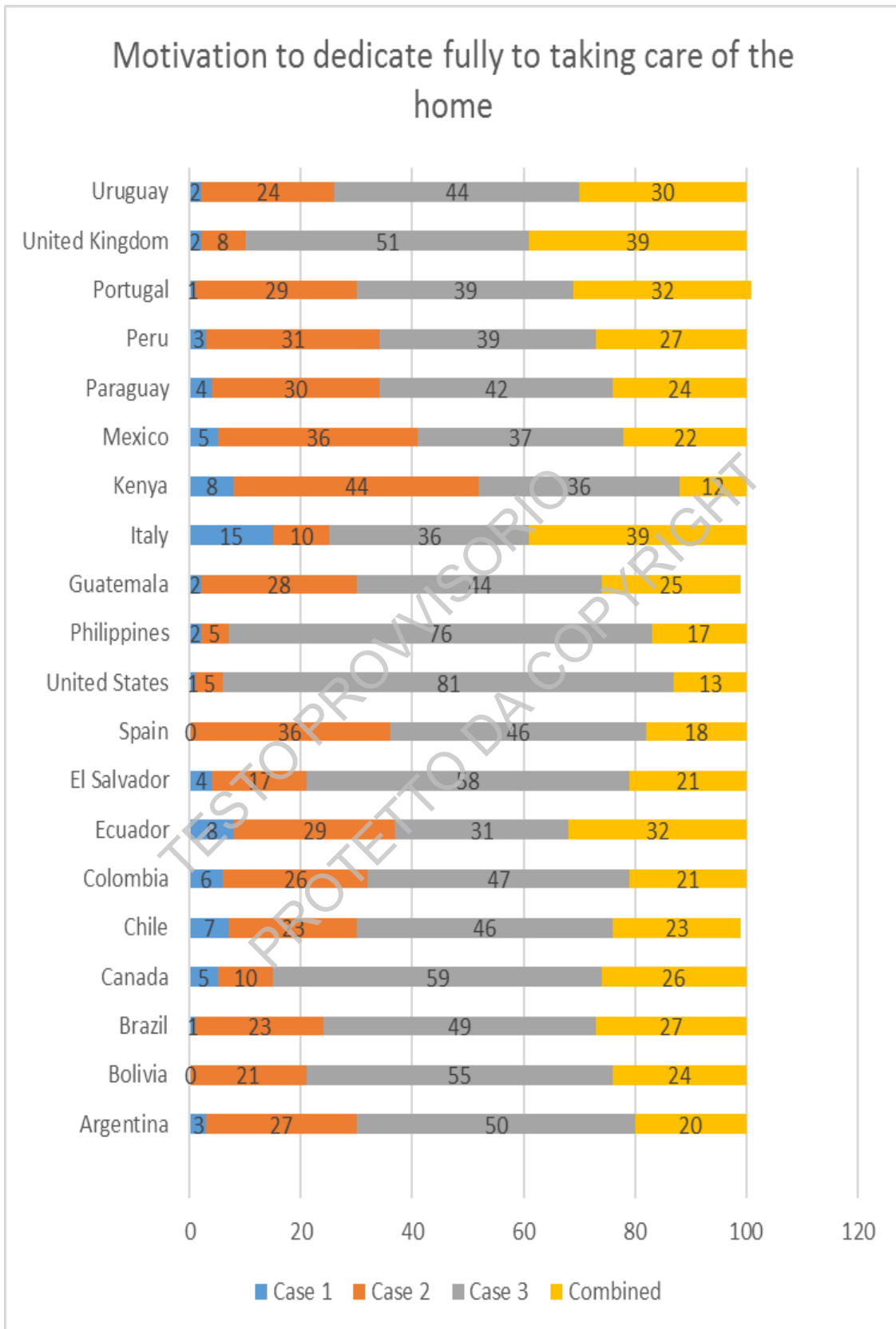


Figure 2



Appendix A

CASE A (focused on resignation)

Person A is engaged in household chores primarily due to a lack of opportunity to train and get a good job outside of the home. Person A would not continue with their present role if given the choice and would rather do something else. Work of the home for Person A is basically a necessity of life, as much as breathing or sleeping. Housework is seen as routine and boring, but Person A does not have enough training to work outside of the home and often wants time to pass more quickly and their children to grow more independent. Person A would probably not work full-time in the home if given a choice and would not encourage their children or friends to engage in household chores.

CASE B (focused on the temporal and transient nature of the task)

Person B basically enjoys the housework but does not expect to dwell on it for long. The plan is to devote fully to the work of the home while the children are young and then move on to paid work outside the home. Person B does not seek training for household chores, as they do not consider it necessary but aspires to get a job outside the home as soon as the necessary conditions are met. The work of the home, although seemingly important, to Person B is considered not a priority in life, especially if someone else could do it instead. Person B would encourage their children and friends to only partially dedicate themselves to the tasks of the home, focusing more on their professional development.

CASE C (focused on intrinsic task motivation)

The work of Person C's home is one of the most important aspects of their life. Person C is happy to do housework and often looks for opportunities for training, dedicating themselves full-time to the home as a vital part of who they are and it is one of the first things they say about themselves. Although sometimes housework is a sacrifice, Person C enjoys it and considers it the best investment for life: for their loved ones and their home. Person C understands the work of the home as a service to other family members and as an opportunity to develop competencies for their life and those of their children. A typical Person C takes pride in being full-time homemaker and often talks about it to friends, feeling good about their work because they love it and because they consider that they are making the world a better place. Person C would encourage their friends and their children to dedicate themselves professionally to the care of the home.