

Invisible Labour: Comparison of Unpaid Work Done by Women and Men across Developed and Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT: The research topic addresses the phenomenon of the gross discrepancy between the quantity of unpaid care work between men and women throughout developed and developing countries. Specifically, this study compares the percentage of a day men and women spend in unpaid work across developed and developing countries through the analysis of secondary data obtained from reputable sources. The results showed that women in both developed and developing countries did a higher proportion of unpaid work in all countries; the disparity between the two genders was significantly higher in most developing countries, with a few exceptions. The disproportionate burden borne by the women among the three groups is also underscored by the fact that the proportion of the day spent in unpaid labour is the same for both developed and developing countries. Additional exploration of related literature suggests that socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the developing countries, which place women in a disadvantaged position in terms of the opportunity for self-development, further accounts for these differences. Various factors, like culture, were identified to account for the differences. As such, the following recommendations were made: institution of gender-equitable policies, free/affordable compulsory education for all, creation of a model to generate monetary values for unpaid labour.

KEYWORDS: Economic empowerment; developed and developing countries; gender inequality; unpaid care work; unpaid female labour.

■ Introduction

Invisible Labour: Comparison of Unpaid Work Done by Women and Men across Developed and Developing Countries:

It is a well-known, but oft-neglected fact that women all around the world, be it in developed or developing countries, carry out a greater share of unpaid care work responsibilities than men every day.¹ Globally, women carry out 76% of the total amount of this work, which is over three times more than men do.¹ Within the context of this research paper, unpaid work is largely centred upon the following two broad categories:

1. Non-market work:

This category includes the production of goods and services that are not sold in the market. Subsistence agriculture, i.e., the production of food for own consumption, is a good example.²

2. Unpaid care work:

The unpaid care work, also known as household work, domestic labour, or family work, encompasses the provision of services for family and community members outside of the market.² Caring for other people's children, or other family dependents (whether the sick or elderly), often represents a form of informal reciprocity that is repaid in kind by providing care for their family members in times of need.²

This unpaid care work that is critical to everyday life lies at the heart of the productivity of a nation. The quantification of unpaid care work and non-market work for the purpose of national income accounting is a complex issue obscured by its very nature and subjectivity. Many of the unpaid workers are engaged in activities that are fundamentally indistinguishable in most respects from paid employment. The unpaid work

can't always be put strictly into the category of work without remuneration. However, if a paid service provider were to take up a portion of this unpaid work, then this would ensure the delivery of professional care.³ Many labour force surveys consider 'unpaid family workers' as those who contribute to a family farm or enterprise without receiving direct payment, as an indirect contributor to the family income, essentially acknowledging that they are contributing to the economy.² However, the lack of direct compensation means that their work is difficult to quantify. Another factor that complicates the quantification of unpaid labour is the concern for the well-being of care recipients, which often affects the quality of the services rendered.² In the absence of logically fair quantification of unpaid work, the imbalance in unpaid work distribution goes unnoticed by policymakers.

Women's unequal share of unpaid care work has long been recognised by various social organisations as a key dimension of gender inequality. The patriarchal society considers unpaid care work as a female's responsibility.⁴ Policymakers are unable to recognise the existence of an unpaid labour force, which is not only taken for granted, but also frees up other individuals for paid work. For instance, housewives taking up unpaid work (caring for young children and the elderly) enables their husbands to do full-time work and receive full compensation without having to worry about home care responsibilities. However, this places women in the disadvantageous position of financial dependence, which clearly sets the foundation for gender disparity. Women across different regions, classes, and cultures spend a significant portion of their day on meeting the expectations of their household duties.⁴ More than just an

issue of economic inequality, this unequal division of unpaid labour essentially limits women from achieving their potential in various spheres of life. Even when women do paid work, the expectation that they fulfil their unpaid activities limits their options on the paid activities due to these constraints. Therefore, their performance of paid work over and above the unpaid work simply creates a double burden for women.

The way society and policymakers have been addressing this issue of disproportionate involvement of women in daily unpaid care work also has important implications for the achievement of gender equality. They can either expand the capabilities and choices of women and men, or confine women to traditional roles associated with femininity and motherhood.⁴ Essentially, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men infringes on women's rights and constitutes a stumbling block on their economic empowerment.⁵

Furthermore, the level of development of the economy has definite implications in precipitating gender inequality, as it affects not only the duration, but also the distribution, of time between paid/unpaid work and the allocation of unpaid time among a variety of activities. Specifically, the lack of an adequate public sector infrastructure and the absence of social service delivery services can also play a role in the specific allocation of time among a variety of unpaid tasks.⁶ As a consequence, women in rural communities of developing countries have to devote more time than their counterparts in developed communities to perform basic domestic tasks, such as fetching water or engaging in subsistence production.⁶ The provision of amenities and services, such as water delivery to one's doorstep, child and elder care, as well as universal free access to health services, would reduce the amount of time needed for women in developing countries to perform these unpaid tasks, thus reducing such an imbalance.

Moreover, in the developed economies, paid job opportunities are higher for a wider segment of the population. In fact, women in developed countries comprise a high percentage of women in the workforce: Sweden and Denmark, 75%; the United States, 60%; and the United Kingdom, 59%. Conversely, women in developing countries make up only 31% of the formal labour force, such as 33% in Brazil and Chile, as well as 32% in Mexico.⁷ Nonetheless, between 65% to 90% of all part-time workers are women, due to their unpaid child care and home-based responsibilities.⁷ Further exacerbating the lack of inequity in the workplace situation is the concentration of employment opportunities in a narrow range of sectors (especially services, where access to jobs is easier, but wages are often lower and job security minimal).⁷

Despite the above-mentioned differentiating elements between the conditions of the women living in developing and developed countries, both groups perform disproportionately more unpaid work than their male counterparts.⁸ Today, in mainstream economic policy discussions, the disparity between unpaid care work taken up by men and women has been identified as a major constraint to both economic growth and women's economic empowerment.²

This research study sought to offer a global overview of the situation through a statistical comparison of the inequality in the distribution of unpaid labour between males and females in a selection of developed and developing countries. The adoption of this broad overview of countries using the paradigm of developmental status was deliberate to evaluate the impact of socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as their interaction, by situating it within the context of an exhaustive review of the literature.

■ Methods

Research Aim & Research Approach:

The research aim of this study was to compare the proportion of daily hours of total unpaid care work by women and men among the developed and developing countries, thus ascertaining the relative impact of gender and development status. The hypotheses that would be evaluated are presented below:

1a. Null Hypothesis 1:

There is no difference between the mean percentages of daily unpaid care work done by females and males.

1b. Alternative Hypothesis 1:

There is a difference between the mean percentages of daily unpaid care work done by females and males.

2a. Null Hypothesis 2:

There is no difference between the mean total percentages of daily unpaid care work done in developed and developing countries.

2b. Alternative Hypothesis 2:

There is a difference between the mean total percentages of daily unpaid care work done in developed and developing countries.

3a. Null Hypothesis 3:

There is no interactive effect between gender and development status on the mean percentage of daily unpaid care work.

3b. Alternative Hypothesis 3:

There is an interactive effect of gender and development status on the mean percentage of daily unpaid care work.

■ Data Collection

To accomplish the objectives, the data from various sources both at the micro and macro levels were utilized in this study. This study has collected the data on proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work from the following sources:

1. Developed:

Australia and New Zealand (South Pacific); Hong Kong and Japan (East Asia); Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland (Scandinavia); UK, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Estonia, Greece; Poland (Western, Northern, and Eastern Europe); US and Canada (North America).

2. Developing:

Mexico, Cuba, Costa Rica, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia (Central and South America); Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Armenia, Kazakhstan (Northern, Western, Central Asia); India, China, Bhutan, Thailand, Cambodia (East Asia); Cameroon and South Africa (Africa).

Data Analysis:

A two-way ANOVA analysis was also run to determine whether mean differences between the percentages of daily unpaid care work by gender and developmental status are statistically significant and whether there is an interactive effect between the two factors. Furthermore, the implications of the inequitable distribution of unpaid labour between males and females were used as a springboard for further exploration within the context of the literature.

■ Results and Discussion

In this section, the differences between the mean percentages of the day spent in unpaid labour of males and females of a selection of developed and developing countries are presented and analysed in detail (see the raw data in the Appendix).

A Two-Way ANOVA with Replication was run to compare the differences between the mean percentages of day spent in unpaid labour between females and males in a selection of developed and developing countries, as well as determine their statistical significance. The results are presented in Table 1. The main effect of gender yielded an F ratio of 176.49, $p < .01$, which was substantial. It indicates that the differences in the mean percentages of day spent in unpaid labour between males ($M = 9.13\%$, $SD = 2.7\%$) and females ($M = 15.88\%$, $SD = 2.37\%$) in the developed countries, as well as the males ($M = 6.2\%$, $SD = 3.0\%$) and females ($M = 18.6\%$, $SD = 4.43\%$) in the developing countries, is statistically significant. As noted in the literature, females work more than males in both developed and developing countries. The disparity in developing countries is almost double that of developed countries.

Table 1: Two-Way ANOVA with replication — Mean percentages of day spent in unpaid work among females and males in developed and developing countries.

SUMMARY	Male	Female	Total
Developed			
Count	20	20	40
Sum	182.5	317.5	500
Average	9.125	15.875	12.5
Variance	7.29565789	5.62828947	17.9789744
SD	2.70	2.37	4.24
Developing			
Count	20	20	40
Sum	124	372	496
Average	6.2	18.6	12.4
Variance	9.01052632	19.6210526	53.374359
SD	3.00	4.43	7.31

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F _{crit}
Sample (Development)	0.2	1	0.2	0.01925135	0.89001531	3.96675978
Columns (Gender)	1833.6125	1	1833.6125	176.497584	1.66E-21	3.96675978
Interaction	159.6125	1	159.6125	15.3637809	0.00019255	3.96675978
Within	789.555	76	10.3888816			
Total	2782.98	79				

These findings confirm the prevalent literature that women all over the world spend a substantial amount of daily time on activities that are not typically recorded as 'economic activities', in addition to their part-time or full-time job. Statistically, women spend an average of 4.5 hours a day on unpaid work. That is more than double the amount of time men spend.¹¹ Hence, female participation in labour markets tends to increase when the time-cost of unpaid care work is reduced, shared equally with men, and/or made more compatible with market work.¹² For instance, a typical Ghanaian woman, works on average, 13 hours per day. However, while 40% of her day's work is paid, most of her work is unpaid.⁵ Conversely, men spend their non-work time on leisure activities, such as playing sports, watching TV, and hanging out with friends.¹³ Consequently, reducing the gender imbalance in the time devoted to unpaid care work will have a positive impact on reducing gender inequality in every sphere of life.

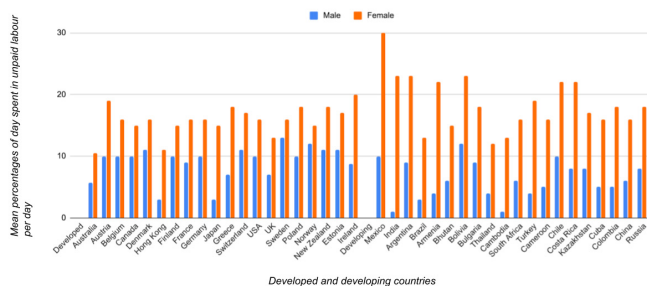
As for the main effect of development status, it is not statistically significant, with an F ratio of .02, $p = .89$. This statistical result is unsurprising, given how close the mean ratings are for the two groupings: developed countries ($M = 12.5\%$, $SD = 4.24\%$) versus developing ($M = 12.4\%$, $SD = 7.31\%$). This indicates that the mean percentage of a day spent in unpaid labour is largely the same, whether one is living in a developed country or a developing country. This finding thus challenges the literature that points out that time spent in unpaid labour in developing countries exceeds that of developed countries due to the absence of proper infrastructure. Rather, the actual inequity in unpaid labour stems from the fact that the responsibility is largely imposed upon women, particularly those in developing countries.

Nonetheless, the interaction effect (though smaller in size than in the case of gender) is still significant, F ratio = 15.36, $p < .01$. The statistical significance of the interaction effect between gender and developmental highlights the need to acknowledge the differences in the mean percentages of day spent in unpaid labour of females living in developed and developing countries, as well as the corresponding figures of their male counterparts. First, the mean percentage of the day spent in unpaid work among women ($M = 18.6\%$, $SD = 4.43\%$) exceeds that of their counterparts in the developed countries ($M = 15.88\%$, $SD = 2.37\%$) by 2.72%. In the meantime, the males in the developed countries ($M = 9.13\%$, $SD = 2.7$) had a higher mean percentage of the day spent in unpaid labour than their counterparts in the developing countries ($M = 6.2\%$, $SD = 3.00$) by 2.93%. Given the fact that both developed countries and developing countries had similar percentages of time spent in unpaid labour, it is evident that women in developing countries bear the greatest brunt of the labour among all three groups, thus highlighting the interaction effect of both gender and developmental status in influencing their situation with regards to unpaid labour.

A close examination of the differences between the percentage of the day spent in unpaid labour between the genders of individual developed and developing countries also generates additional insights. Figure 1 shows the striking differences between the mean percentages of the day spent in unpaid labour of women and men per day, particularly among the developing

countries. In particular, developing countries like India stand out with the ratio of unpaid work of women to men standing at 6.83:1 (women: 24.46%, men: 3.58%), with Turkey having a ratio of 4.50:1 (women: 21.17%, men: 4.71%) and Mexico with a ratio of 2.52:1 (women: 23%, men: 9.13%). In stark contrast, among the developed countries, particularly those in Europe, the disparity between the genders is slightly better, with the ratio of the unpaid work of women to men going as low as 1.5 times in Norway (women: 15.83%, men: 11.71%). Denmark has a ratio of 1.3:1 (women: 16.87%, men: 12.92%), while France has a ratio of 1.66:1 (women: 15.54%, men: 9.37%).

However, among some developed countries, the ratio of the unpaid work of women to men can still go as high as 5.56 times, as in the case of Japan (women devoting 15.75% of the day, men 2.83% of the day) and 3.66 times in Hong Kong (women devoting 11% of the day, men 3% of the day). This reality among some developed countries highlights the prevalence of gender inequality across the globe in irrespective of higher economic development.



Male vs Female Hours of Unpaid Labour: Developed and Developing Countries.

Figure 1: Mean percentages of the day spent in unpaid labour of males and females in developed and developing countries. Globally, women take up a higher proportion of the unpaid work; the disparity is less in developed countries.

The significant gender disparity among the developed countries of the East Asia and Pacific region in comparison to the other higher income countries of the Western region or Europe may be attributed to the cultural foundation and its development over the centuries. Although the role that Japanese society ascribes to women has changed over the course of time, reflecting the trends of respective eras, the current expectations of Japanese women are still founded on historical norms. Before the Meiji era at the end of the 19th century, women were expected to stay within the home, as opposed to their husbands, who were expected to seek out jobs; this served as the foundation of the government and Confucian ideas, as each home represented a building block for the culture.^{14,15} Despite the changes in consumer culture and the modernisation of Japanese industry, more emphasis was put into the upholding of the patriarchy, particularly to the adherence of familial roles and structures, contributing to an intensification of gender roles.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

When discussing gender roles, Dalton's research reveals that there is still a significant trend towards traditional gender role expectations in Japanese society, such as women being homemakers or, even more importantly, mothers, despite procuring

outside employment or even positions in the Japanese government.¹⁹ The women in Japan choose to contribute to the economy via paid work alongside their male counterparts, as well as conform to these extremely traditional gender roles; therefore, the role of a modern woman is difficult in Japan as women try to balance personal, traditional, and community values.²⁰⁻²²

Such cultural issues with the specific region, irrespective of development, may be keeping a larger section of the women population away from the full-time paid labour market. This aspect of society needs to be addressed closely by policy makers to redress gender inequality in these countries.

■ Conclusion

The data analysis of the mean percentages of unpaid work per day of males and females in 20 developing and 20 developed countries shows that gender is the chief determinant of the proportion of time spent in unpaid labour, regardless of the development status of the countries. Specifically, women spend a greater proportion of time in unpaid labour than their male counterparts. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there are no differences between the mean percentages of unpaid work per day between the genders in both developed and developing countries can be rejected. Women in developing countries bear the greatest proportion of the responsibility of unpaid labour among all four groups. On the other hand, the total mean proportions of time spent in unpaid labour are extremely similar in both developed and developing countries. However, the interaction effect between gender and the development status of the countries is statistically significant. This even though the total amounts of daily unpaid work are the same for both developed and developing countries, women in developed countries do less of time proportionally than their female counterparts in developing countries, we can see how the females in developing countries are experiencing a high level of gender inequity in their societies vis-a-vis their male counterparts.

What the results of this research study have confirmed is the sheer extent of the inequitable distribution of unpaid labour between men and women, as well as its broader implications. Traditionally, in most societies, the breadwinner always has the upper hand over other household members. This thus places female members in a disadvantageous position to their male counterparts in all respects. When women spend almost eight times the amount of time that men spend on unpaid care work, they represent only 35% of the labour force.¹¹ However, when women spend less than two times the amount, their labour force participation increases to 50% of the active population.¹¹ And therefore, women's unpaid care work often remains unrecognized and undervalued, while men receive a larger share of income and recognition for their economic contributions. The evenly distributed unpaid care work between men and women would help in alleviating the gender inequality. Currently, as females are primarily tasked with carrying out various unpaid tasks like unpaid care work, unpaid work for subsistence, or invisible contributions toward market production,⁵ their ability to dictate the quality of their participation and pay is necessarily stymied.¹ Furthermore,

women with higher housework responsibilities are more likely to enter flexible, part-time, or informal jobs, at establishments in the vicinity to supplement the household income. Also, the burden of unpaid care work correlates with higher gender wage gaps. Women earn 65% of male wages when they spend twice as much time as men on unpaid care activities and 40% of male wages when they spend five times more.¹¹ As a consequence, females also face all types of exploitation at work, which undermines their physical, mental, and overall well-being. Finally, because unpaid care work is time intensive, women who juggle both paid and unpaid work are often unable to enjoy their right to rest and leisure.²³

The burden of unpaid labour is even more debilitating for women in developing countries. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that Women living in socio-economically backward regions, particularly in the predominantly agrarian societies of developing countries, are compelled to spend long hours doing invisible work due to the lack of investments in basic infrastructure. Therefore, the development of facilities that could bring safe drinking water at the doorstep of every citizen would be a single greatest input which would bring down the large quantum of invisible work for women and girls drastically.⁵ Similarly, the facility of gas stoves at the doorstep of every household would not only save the hours of females unpaid work of getting firewood for cooking, but also help to reduce various health ailments.²⁴ The lesser the amount of invisible work, the greater the amount of time and energy, which could be diverted to more productive economic development of the household or investments in the future such as education for girls.

Thus, one can see how the socio-economic backwardness of a region can play an instrumental role in trapping women and young girls in their vulnerable position. Within a financially fragile rural household system, racked by poverty, the traditional mindset that forces females to engage in unpaid labour, instead of investing in their education for the future, prevails.²⁵ As a result, the entire family remains stuck in vicious generational cycles of illiteracy and poverty.

More than just an economic issue, the prevalence of this historical bias in the inequitable division of unpaid labour between the genders is also a reflection of the entrenchment of patriarchal culture, which transcends the differences between the development status of the countries. This can certainly account for why the differences between the gender had a far greater statistically significant effect than the interaction effect. Regardless of whether they live in developed or underdeveloped countries, women are still overrepresented among the underpaid and unprotected workers around the world. Despite their contributions to the economy, returns to education are lower for women, gender-based wage differentials persist, and market segmentation and occupational segregation further exacerbate inequalities.²⁶

This inequitable division of unpaid labour is more than just a loss for women and a question of gender inequality. Rather, it is an issue that needs to be embraced by entire nations. Studies have suggested that there could be an almost linear relationship between the invisible work that women perform

in taking full care of family burden at home and the men getting paid for his work contribution to society.⁵ Time-use data show how many minutes or hours individuals devote to activities such as paid work and unpaid work including household chores and childcare, and self-care activities.²⁷ Unfortunately, because time-use data is not a regular feature of national statistical systems in many countries, unpaid work is primarily invisible. Even where some time-use data are available, this unremunerated work is not yet recognized as important work that should be covered under economic policies.³ As such, females' unpaid work is reduced to an invisible contribution to the national GDP, which is not acknowledged. Although it is difficult to quantify the value of unpaid work done for others within households, whose quality cannot be reduced to numbers, various studies and models have shown that the monetary value of women's unpaid care work globally for women aged 15 and over is at least USD10.8 trillion annually.²⁸ What this figure suggests is that, without a shadow of a doubt, no nation can develop without the participation of women. There are several ways to close the time gap. Diane Elson has suggested a model with three interconnected dimensions that seeks to address and incorporate unpaid care work into the development agenda: Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution.²⁹

Therefore, it is long overdue that policymakers redress this imbalance through proactive measures that can transform the lives of women for the better:

- ***Development of economic and social infrastructure:***

Economic development goes hand in hand with social development. Technology plays a key role in reducing the time chores. Socio-economic infrastructure in neglected areas could play a prominent role in helping women reduce their quantum of unpaid work. Think about the time when women in many developed regions use to spend on washing clothes and cooking before the invention of modern appliances. Investing in public infrastructure and providing basic services such as childcare can lift the constraints on women's time and increase their participation in the labour force.

On a larger scale, the larger investments in developing social infrastructure like education institutions and health facilities can go a long way in lifting the population below the poverty line and enabling it to benefit from the economic growth of mainstream society.

- ***Institution of gender-equitable policies:***

Redistributing more unpaid work to men can be implemented through policies, like paid family leave. Working women would have the opportunity to return to their jobs after having a baby when they have paid leave, while men could be granted paternity leave to spend extra hours on childcare.¹³

- ***Free/affordable compulsory education for all:***

Traditional societies in developing countries, like India, particularly in the rural areas, do not support education for females. The prospects of females in improving their life circumstances through education are often limited by the oppressive and conservative attitudes of the male heads of patriarchal households. Illiteracy among females plays a leading role in perpetuating their vulnerability and inequality. Therefore, free, and com

pulsory state-sponsored education at the grassroots level will provide girls with the opportunity to transcend their situation so that they would have the wherewithal and the confidence to fight for gender inequality when they are grown up. With education, women, certainly those in the developing world, will be able to redress the vast gap in the gender disparity and catch up to their counterparts in the developed world.

● **Creation of a model to generate monetary values for unpaid labour:**

What could really restore the imbalance in gender disparity, while acknowledging the importance of the unpaid work done by women, is to develop empirical models that could quantify unpaid labour and provide women with a source of income.

The study reveals two key phenomena that should be redressed. First, there is a noticeable difference in the quantum of daily unpaid care work put in by the women in comparison to men across the globe, irrespective of economic development, the difference. Second, there is a far more pronounced male-female disparity in the amount of time spent in unpaid labour in the case of developing economies of the world. Therefore, clearly, the entrenched gender-stereotypical norms of the patriarchal society, coupled with the socio-economic realities of countries, play a dominant role in perpetuating the current gender-related inequality in the amount of time spent in unpaid labour. Therefore, policies pushing for the recognition of unpaid care work by apportioning payments to it and/or the redistribution of unpaid care work between women and men would go a long way in shaping the societies for a better progressive future.

The quantitative aspect of unpaid work imbalance in the light of other factors like education and employment impacting the Economic growth would be an area of future research. Further, the aspects concerning different cultures, ethnicities, and geographical regions can be included in the study.

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■ Appendix

Mean Percentages of Day Spent in Unpaid Labour Per Day of Males and Females in Developed and Developing Countries

<u>Developed</u>	Male	Female
Australia	5.7	10.5
Austria	10	19
Belgium	10	16
Canada	10	15
Denmark	11	16
Hong Kong	3	11
Finland	10	15
France	9	16
Germany	10	16
Japan	3	15
Greece	7	18
Switzerland	11	17
USA	10	16
UK	7	13
Sweden	13	16
Poland	10	18
Norway	12	15
New Zealand	11	18
Estonia	11	17
Ireland	8.8	20

<u>Developing</u>	Male	Female
Mexico	10	30
India	1	23
Argentina	9	23
Brazil	3	13
Armenia	4	22
Bhutan	6	15
Bolivia	12	23
Bulgaria	9	18
Thailand	4	12
Cambodia	1	13
South Africa	6	16
Turkey	4	19
Cameroon	5	16
Chile	10	22
Costa Rica	8	22
Kazakhstan	8	17
Cuba	5	16
Colombia	5	18
China	6	16
Russia	8	18