

# Can Sales Make You More Resilient?

Experimental Evidence from India Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

We examine the impact of selling on resilience in vulnerable populations during the most disruptive shock the world has seen in decades, the COVID-19 pandemic. We present a theoretical framework that describes how engaging in sales activities can lead to greater resilience, which we define as the ability to cope with adversity. We then test the impact of these activities in a large-scale field experiment involving women in rural Uttar Pradesh, India. From among 1,048 women who expressed interest in employment opportunities, we randomly assigned 378 women to a sales employment condition, and 377 women to one of two control conditions. We examine the impact of sales activities on two dimensions of resilience: social-economic and psychological. Our results demonstrate several aspects of the impact of selling on resilience. First, we show that women engaged in sales, compared to those engaged in a non-sales employment task or in a “business as usual” control group, are substantially more likely to demonstrate resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, they are more likely to have access to larger and more diverse support network, more likely to be aware and have access to external sources of help, as food and livelihood programs (social-economic resilience). We also find they are more likely to report to be able to cope and adapt to hardship faced (psychological resilience). Second, we present evidence that women engaged in sales tasks obtain more diverse social networks. Finally, we show that diverse social networks are a key mechanism that explains the impact of selling on resilience. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to provide causal evidence that demonstrates the positive spillover impact of a professional activity – selling – to the personal lives of those engaged in this activity.

**Keywords:** Sales, Salesperson, Marketing Employment, Resilience, Field Experiment, Emerging Markets