

Gender Discrimination in Small Business Acquisitions: a Field Experiment

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Abstract

Purpose: The study reported in this paper investigated gender discrimination in small business acquisitions in Sweden. It aimed to determine whether women face unequal treatment compared to men when acquiring businesses. **Design/methodology/approach:** A preregistered randomized field experiment was conducted by sending fictitious inquiries from male and female buyers to business sellers advertising online. The gender of the fictitious buyer was indicated using common Swedish male- and female-sounding names. The sample comprised 882 small business sellers, categorized into male-dominated, female-dominated, and gender-neutral sectors. The primary outcome metric was whether the buyer's gender influenced the probability of receiving a positive response from the seller. **Findings:** The probability of receiving a positive response from business sellers was generally high for both male and female buyers. In female-dominated sectors, female buyers had a higher probability of receiving a positive response than male buyers, and this difference was statistically significant. In contrast, in male-dominated sectors, female buyers had a slightly lower probability of receiving a positive response than male buyers, though this difference was not statistically significant. **Originality/value:** This research offers new insights into gender dynamics in business acquisitions, an area with limited empirical evidence. Using a randomized field experiment provides causal evidence on how gender influences business transactions. The findings suggest that women may not face uniform disadvantages across all sectors and may even have advantages in female-dominated industries.

Keywords: Gender Norms; Gender Discrimination; Small Business Acquisitions; Field Experiment