

Surviving Auschwitz and Pre-Existing Social Ties

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Abstract

Survivor testimonies link survival in deadly POW camps, Gulags, and Nazi concentration camps to the ability of prisoners to get help from friends present in the camp. We study the case of several hundred prisoners of a small, low-security Nazi agricultural labor camp located in today's Czech Republic, who were ultimately on transports to Auschwitz, a deadly extermination and labor camp. We ask whether their chances of surviving the Holocaust depended on how many of their former co-laborers from the agricultural camp were present on their transports to Auschwitz, which included another 9 thousand Czech male prisoners. We uncover a large, 10 percentage point survival advantage to having arrived in Auschwitz with at least 50 former co-laborers from the agricultural labor camp. This evidence is similar to that provided by Costa and Kahn (2007) for a US Civil War POW camp, and consistent with the fundamentally selective accounts provided by survivors.

Keywords: Nazi Concentration Camp, Survival, Social Structure, Theresienstadt/Terezín

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