

Public Abstract

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This study addresses one of the core topics in anthropology: the development of complex society. Many researchers have attempted to examine how and why societies change. In my work I look for connections between the health of a population and the system of rule under which they live. My overall hypothesis is that a state-level society, one that has a fixed hierarchical system of authority, provides stability and is able for force its population to work harder, with benefits toward the general health of its population. In contrast, in less-structured non-state societies such as those categorized as bands or chiefdoms, increasing complexity has been linked with worse general health for its population. The interaction between health and society is an important subject because these two general elements have been constants in the existence of our species, and continue to be important in our own lives. Consider that we are living in a state-level society.

The case study I use to test my hypothesis is a collection of skeletal remains from one of the prehistoric urban state cemeteries of Armatambo, located in central Peru. This collection is well suited to test my hypothesis since I can compare the overall state of health from this to those of other non-states in the same region that were previously investigated by other anthropologists.

My results suggest that state-level society does provide some buffering against poor health that is not seen in complex but non-state societies. In particular, poor health related to chronic anemia was found to be less evident in the Armatambo skeletal collection. Also, the mechanism by which health is improved may be due to the ability of the state to organize labor more effectively. This interpretation is suggested by the higher rates of osteoarthritis found in parts of the spine in the Armatambo skeletal population relative to other collections.

This study found interesting contrasts in the relationship between health and social complexity. Further work can see whether state societies in other parts of the world also provide a relative boost in health.