

Distress and wellbeing in Ladakh's changing environment

Amelia Colliver

Ladakh, a high-altitude region of Northwestern India, is currently experiencing complex socioeconomic and ecological changes which are destabilizing daily life through changes in natural disaster prevalence, occupational and educational opportunity, urbanization, and transportation networks. Although existing data is limited due to small sample sizes and the lack of validated measures of mental health disorder in the Ladakhi context, research on the prevalence of mental health disorder as well as risk factors points to a trend of rapidly increasing prevalence of mental health disorders. This trend seems to be related to female gender, rural birthplace, and exposure to both chronic and acute climate disasters. This study uses semi-structured qualitative interviews based on Butler and Kern's 2016 PERMA profile of wellbeing, as well as ethnographic methods, to understand perceptions of climate and cultural change among Ladakhi women and girls as well as its impact on their individual and community wellbeing. In addition, it seeks to provide a sociological framework for better understanding manifestations of wellness and distress within Ladakh's unique cultural context. The described findings will be used to inform future research on the validation of epidemiologic measures and development of effective psychosocial interventions in the region.

Amelia Colliver is in her final semester of the Master's of Public Health (MPH) programme at New York University. She also holds a BA in Political Economics from the University of Puget Sound. She is interested in the epidemiology of mental health disorders, particularly the ways in which climate change and other macro-level social, political, and economic factors impact the prevalence of common disorders such as anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders.

She is currently involved in two research labs at NYU: the Bunting Research Lab, which seeks to understand behavioural patterns among polysubstance users in New York State, and the Climate Health and Justice Lab, with whom she is helping to produce a scoping review on the health impacts of climate change on youth. At the ITM Colloquium this November, she will be presenting on her research conducted in Ladakh, India from her time as Fulbright-Nehru Research Scholar in 2022.

