

Living in an urban environment reduces our ability to concentrate on tasks

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(Medical Xpress)—People living in urbanised environments are less able to concentrate on the task in hand than people who live in remote areas, according to research from Goldsmiths, University of London funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

A study led by Dr Karina Linnell, from the Department of Psychology, examined the effect of urbanisation on a remote Namibian tribe and found that those who had not moved to an urbanised environment were more able to concentrate in [cognitive tests](#).

Dr Linnell said that the findings suggest that people living in an urbanised environment, which is the majority of people in the developed world, are not functioning at their optimum level of attentional engagement.

Dr Linnell commented: "Attentional engagement has a big impact on our ability to conduct tasks to the highest standard. What if, for example, companies realised certain tasks would be better carried out by employees based outside of the urban environment where their concentration ability is better?"

Dr Linnell and her collaborators Professor Davidoff, Dr Caparos, and Dr de Fockert, studied the Himba tribe in Namibia - a remote cattle-herding tribe living a secure and self-sufficient existence in the open bush of northwest Namibia. The team compared traditional Himba with 'urbanised' Himba – those who had moved to a nearby town - and

urbanised British.

The tasks involved attending to centrally-presented target information and ignoring peripheral information. Participants were, for example, shown an image with a face in the middle and asked to signal which way it was facing, while ignoring related faces appearing in the periphery of the image.

The results showed that attention was focused in traditional Himba, but defocused in the urbanised Himba and British participants living in London. Even the Himba who had had a traditional upbringing and then relocated to an [urban environment](#) were defocused in the tasks.

Dr Linnell added: "While for this research we focused on the Himba to ensure a suitable control group, the findings do have wider implications. This research suggests a trend that people who live in less urbanised areas of the UK, such as the Shetlands, may be in a better cognitive state to concentrate on tasks than those who live in large cities. "

Provided by Goldsmiths, University of London

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