

Meet Sharna Jamadar

What do you do?

I'm a neuroscientist. That means I study the brain using cool machines like MRI and PET scans. These machines let me see how different parts of the brain light up when people do different things, and I'm curious about how these patterns can be different from one person to another.

I run a research lab where we focus on two big questions. First, I want to find out if doing brainy activities like puzzles or having a challenging job can help people stay sharp as they get older. Second, I'm interested in how becoming a mom or dad changes your brain. Some people think having a baby makes you forgetful, but our research suggests that being a parent might actually make your brain better in a lot of ways!

How did you get into that job?

I grew up in the Hunter region of New South Wales and always wanted to go to university, but I wasn't sure what I wanted to study. I started with maths and computer science but soon realised it wasn't for me. After taking a break for six months, I decided to study psychology because I was fascinated by how people think and behave.

At first, I thought I'd become a clinical psychologist, but by the end of my degree, I realised I loved learning about the brain even more. So, I decided to do a PhD in neuroscience. It was challenging but exciting! I love seeing people's brains in action and figuring out how they work.

What do you love about your job?

I love that I get to research things I find really interesting. Whenever I wonder, "Why does that happen?" or "Why do people experience certain things?" I can design experiments to find out! I get to choose my own research topics and explore my curiosity, which is super fun.



My job has also let me travel all over the world, from Europe and the USA to Asia and even Antarctica! I've made friends from all over, and it's been amazing.

How does your job help people/the community/the world?

My research helps people live happier and healthier lives for longer. Instead of just studying diseases, I look at what's normal in the brain as we age and when we become parents. Understanding what's normal helps us figure out what goes wrong when people are unwell.

What are two things you're not good at?

When I start something new, I often feel like I can't do it well. But I always find a way to get better, even if I need to ask for help.

I'm also not great at artistic stuff like drawing or painting. My hands don't seem to follow what I see in my mind, but I still enjoy being creative, even if the result isn't perfect!

What are two things you are good at?

I'm good at sticking with things, even when I think I can't do them. If I need to learn something new, I dive right in, and sometimes I ask friends for help.

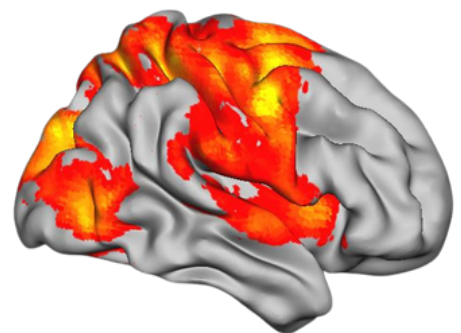
I'm also pretty good at writing. At first, it was tough to express my thoughts clearly on paper, but with practice and help from my PhD supervisor, I got much better. Writing is a skill that takes time and effort to develop.

What makes you happy (outside of work)?

I really love travelling and seeing the world – and I'm almost always fascinated by the people and how they live their lives – I love getting that insight into the daily lives of people all over the world. I also love watching old movies and reading books that were written many years ago. I love switching off and imagining living in times that have gone by.

Where do you want your career to take you?

One thing I love is helping people become scientists. I've got a wonderful team of students and I am constantly learning from them. I'm lucky that I get to help them on their journey towards their own careers in STEM.



Example: MRI and PET show which parts of the brain light up when people are thinking or doing particular tasks. This technology uses physics and engineering.

