

# Supporting good health with a postdoc and mental health focus

My background: PhD, postdocs, PI

I'm a mental health first aider (MHFA) and an MHFA instructor

1000+ MHFA chats with students and colleagues (some during trade union casework)



MHFA England

# Common themes in postdoc MHFA chats

An existing condition/challenge that needs support

Overwork – juggling projects, publishing, competing, how much is enough?  
life/work imbalance

Unhealthy perfectionism

Taking work personally, never saying no

Not knowing how to deal with ‘failures’

Imposter syndrome (doubting own ability, feeling a fraud/unwelcome)

Poor working relationships, power dynamics, bullying, discrimination

Loneliness

Burn out

Money, moving, life stages and family worries

Career progression worries

Not knowing where to get support

# Support a healthy culture

## Talk about the good and the tough times

e.g., 'CV of failures'

Degree programs I did not get into	
2008	PhD Program in Economics, Stockholm School of Economics
2003	Graduate Course in Medicine, Cambridge University Graduate Course in Medicine, UCL PhD Program in Psychology, Harvard University PhD Program in Neuroscience and Psychology, Stanford University
1999	BA in International Relations, London School of Economics
Academic positions and fellowships I did not get	
2014	Harvard Kennedy School Assistant Professorship UC Berkeley Agricultural and Resource Economics Assistant Professorship MIT Brain & Cognitive Sciences Assistant Professorship This list is restricted to institutions where I had campus visits; the list of places where I had first-round interviews but wasn't invited for a campus visit, and where I wasn't invited to interview in the first place, is much longer and I will write it up when I get a chance. The list also shrouds the fact that I didn't apply to most of the top economics departments (Harvard, MIT, Yale, Stanford, Princeton, Chicago, Berkeley, LSE) because one of my advisors felt they could not write a strong letter for them.
Awards and scholarships I did not get	
2011	Swiss Network for International Studies PhD Award
2010	Society of Fellows, Harvard University Society in Science Scholarship University of Zurich Research Scholarship



'Another day, another grant rejection'

2023 in numbers  
4 paper rejections  
1 grant rejection  
1 job rejection

3 reports submitted  
1 project funded  
2 students graduated

# Work to help avoid a 'hidden curriculum'/agenda

It embeds inequalities and poor working practices

Embed and enact access and inclusivity

Don't let minoritized groups do all this work

Learn e.g., [become an active bystander](#)

# Self-care is vital

## Check your own mental health and each other's

Simple exercise – the stress container



# Notice changes?

## Have a chat, use available supports

Examples include:

At serious risk? Call security, go to A&E, [Samaritans](#) etc.

[Imperial's Confidential care](#)

GP

Groups with lived experience e.g., Anxiety UK, No Panic

Colleagues, Imperial's PFDC, managers, HR (mediation?), [MHFAiders](#), [UCU](#), [Report and support](#), [staff supporters](#), [EDIC](#), [Occupational health](#)

Help lines: Samaritans, Mind, CALM

Career advice: colleagues, [PFDC](#), [mentorship](#), [Centre for Academic English](#), [networks](#), [vitae](#), [project and time management training](#)

Self-help: sleep, books, [exercise](#), nature, fun

### Key points:

You are not on your own with this

There is hope and recovery

# Take some MHFA training?

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the Imperial College London Mental Health First Aid website. The browser's address bar shows the URL `imperial.ac.uk/health-and-wellbeing/mental-health/mental-health-first-aid/`. The website's navigation menu includes 'Study', 'Research & Innovation', 'Be Inspired', and 'About'. A secondary navigation bar lists categories such as 'Mental health', 'Resilience and stress', 'Advice and support', 'Meditation', 'Physical health', 'Smoke-free Imperial', and 'Live well work well during COVID19'. The main content area features a large image of a man's face with the text 'Mental Health First Aid' and 'First-line support'. A sidebar on the left titled 'Self-help guide resources' contains buttons for 'NHS Mental Wellbeing resources', 'Depression', 'Anxiety', 'Panic', 'Sleep problems and insomnia', and 'Anger'. At the bottom, a cookie consent banner is visible with 'Cookies Settings', 'Reject All', and 'Accept All Cookies' buttons. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 10:33 on 24/03/2023 and the weather as 11°C Partly sunny.

# Any questions?

If not now, then please email them, [anita.hall@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:anita.hall@imperial.ac.uk)