

Season 2 Episode 9: Campus Sexual Assault and Misconduct
[intro music Sun Through Shade]

ABBY: In this episode, we wanted to learn more about resources for sexual assault and sexual misconduct on college campuses. We spoke with Hanin Arqasous, an MPH student and a volunteer with the Aurora Center for Advocacy and Education at the University of Minnesota, to learn more about this important public health topic. We hope you enjoy our interview with this incredible student and advocate.

HANNAH: Thank you so much, Hanin, for taking the time to speak with us. We hope that this episode has helped our listeners better understand the topic of sexual assault and misconduct on college campuses.

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Abby: So to get started, can you tell listeners, your name, your position and a little bit about the work that your organization does?

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Hanin: Okay. My name is Hanin Arqasous and graduate student majoring in community health promotion and I volunteer with Aurora Center for advocacy and education as a sexual assault advocate.

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Hanin: So my organization provides free and, free and confidential services to victims of sexual assault, they

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Hanin: Share violence and stalking and harassment, and also they accept walk-in

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Hanin: Clients during the weekdays from 8am to 4:30pm and, in addition, that we provide 24 hour helpline. And this is exactly what I do with them so

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Hanin: And this helpline, we just like provide like support and we listened to the sexual assault survivors and we try to provide them the resources that they need. Also

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Hanin: Aurora Center facilitates groups, support groups such as sexual assault survivor groups healing after relationship trauma groups, women of color support groups and men identify survivor groups.

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Hannah: So how did you become interested in, in your current work at the Aurora Center.

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Hanin: I like this question because I always like to tell people why I'm why I'm interested in this work.

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Hanin: I actually, in 2018 when I was getting my education and academic English studies at Lewis and Clark College I attended a training about sexual assault peer advocacy.

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Hanin: And in this training. I learned about the substantial impact of sexual violence and survivors, such as like post traumatic stress disorder and how it's important to be supportive listener.

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Hanin: And communicate, and communicate it for the survivor. Also, I remember it was the first time I was told about the concept

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Hanin: Of consent. And how concerned should be look like so. Besides, how much that training was an eye opener for me. I knew this is like something I would like to commit

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Hanin: To in my future. And since then I was like looking for opportunities to become an advocate for sexual assault survivors and help spread the awareness and, you know, even in my personal statement I have mentioned that when I applied to graduate schools.

Abby: So, a quite aside, according to a multi-state sexual assault prevention non-profit, Speak About It, "affirmative consent is a conscious, voluntary, mutual, and enthusiastic agreement to engage in sexual activity. Each person must be fully aware, equally free of coercion, communicating clearly and unambiguously, and sincere in their desires.

Hannah: Consent must be ongoing, and can be revoked at any time. Intoxication or incapacitation negates consent.” This definition is thorough, but a bit dense. If you want a breakdown of this definition you can visit <https://wespeakaboutit.org/affirmative-consent>.

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Abby: So then how would you describe reproductive justice to someone who knows nothing about it?

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Hanin: Yeah. So generally speaking reproductive justice is our human right to have the complete control over our bodies and have the access to quality resources we need to make healthy decisions in all areas of our lives, regardless of our socio economic status.

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Hanin: And it includes all women. It includes LGBT community and youth as well.

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Hannah: And why do you think that reproductive justice is something we should be like concerned about and what are the consequences of potentially ignoring this issue?

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Hanin: I think reproductive justice is an important

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Hanin: Because it demands to address political, economic and social well being and also it helps to address the associated inequalities to reproductive rights.

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Hanin: That like could could negative negatively impact women's ability to access reproductive health care services and to take control over their bodies and lives.

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Hanin: And without reproductive justice people like women and LGBTQ will be oppressed and lose their reproductive autonomy and rights.

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Hanin: As a result of that their overall health will be affected, and we can see significant consequences such as female genital mutilation, that are an awful tradition in the Middle East,

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Hanin: or the high rate of unwanted pregnancies and depression that we can see here in the US.

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Hanin: And speaking of that, I said, remember saying by one of the reproductive justice advocate. Her name is Jessica Waters, she said in her Ted Talk women who cannot control her productive decisions cannot control anything about her life, which I think is a totally true and scary for phenomena.

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Abby: So building off of that question. Can you share a specific example of how advancing reproductive justice can improve the health and well being of young people in communities that you serve?

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Hanin: Yeah, this is a good question because I have a great example of advancing the backs of justice, which is the act of violence I mean like the

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Hanin: Violence Against Women Act in which States are required to provide free sexual assault forensic exams,

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Hanin: and free prevention treatment for STI for sexual assault survivors and also I would like to add these services provided by world trained forensic nurses,

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Hanin: And according to Minnesota's law each survivor has the right to have an advocate to support them during this examination. And do the law enforcement

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Hanin: investigation if the survivor choses to.

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Abby: Do you know if if folks with different gender identities are also

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Abby: Able to receive services?

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Hanin: Yeah. These services are provided to false with different identities and it's provided for male identified

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Hanin: Folks, and when women identifiable folks out as well.

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Hannah: Can you share with us, maybe a challenge of serving the population that you serve?

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Hanin: Yeah, I guess, the lack of awareness about sexual assault and the importance of having a conversation about consent. And how concerned should be look like our

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Hanin: major challenges that make many people be vulnerable to sexual assault, which is something I just learned like lately. Like when it was 28 years only

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Hanin: Now, made me like this is an old days to learn about all these concepts and I feel like I wish, if somebody told me about them before.

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Hanin: And that's why I feel like I am going to try now to, to help to spread the awareness and tell the people about them and how they are important to know and document in our life.

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Abby: Our next question for you is, what are some groups that historically have been underserved by reproductive health providers?

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Hanin: My answer to this question is like women of color because even like reproductive justice is just started by 12 women of colors and I think like they are the most

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Hanin: Vulnerable to

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Hanin: To being an underserved in this case and also LGBTQ community.

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Hanin: In terms of international students. I think we are still have gap this

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Hanin: Population and actually like lately Aurora Center, one of the Aurora Center workers was like trying to communicate with the

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Hanin: International Office at the University of Minnesota to try to to fill that gap and see what kind of needs that they have to provide

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Hanin: And they're still working in that. So I have no idea if there are other like places that they're doing to they're, they're doing work in terms of international status.

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Hanin: but, I, I, I have been interested in that and express my interest because like I know how like international students, they have, they have different background and

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Hanin: They see things differently. And maybe they don't understand that that that the importance of having like support in

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Hanin: Terms of sexual assault and, like, for example, like back in my country, or like in the Middle East in general like women can be like can face rape by their husband, they don't determine that as rape or sexual assault. So I think that is a big gap that we need to like

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Hanin: To to focus on in terms of like educate like now like in like educate but and like to

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Hanin: To share the awareness about like this is not something acceptable and you have to be aware this is something is like harmful for you.

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Abby: So, from your perspective, are there ways that we can make

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Abby: Sexual Assault services like those provided by the Aurora Center and more culturally competent

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Abby: And inclusive of international students?

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Hanin: I think they I like culturally competent, but like the international student. They don't know about like they're not aware about the resources that are available for them, you know,

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Hanin: I think I learned about like how being vulnerable is not something bad.

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Hanin: It's something okay to be vulnerable because like everyone is vulnerable in his or her or her own way.

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Hanin: And

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Hanin: Like

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Hanin: Realizing that you're vulnerable and - how can I say that?- You have to be vulnerable, but fair, so you can be able to serve a voluntary community like this community.

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Hanin: Yeah, I would like to say the continuous education as I told you I got my first training back in 2018 then received been amazing and intensive 40 hours of training on how to support victims survivors of sexual violence and how to prevent future sexual violence from occurring.

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Hanin: Also, I like to watch, like, educational videos and read more about this field in order to enhance how I approach these cases.

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Abby: This question has a little bit more of like a hopeful focus, but have you seen any

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Abby: encouraging developments in reproductive justice?

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Hanin: Yeah, actually in, in this semester I was

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Hanin: Interested to

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Hanin: Develop an intervention for breast feeding and I learned a lot about that. And I found that in some areas they already implemented policies in some areas. I mean, they already implemented policies

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Hanin: That allow women to express breast feeding during this work - during their work time.

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Hanin: And also the research and the studies that focus on identifying and addressing the gaps with reproductive justice,

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00:31:55.590 --> 00:32:10.350

Hanin: the reproductive health, and reproductive rights. And also in some states sex education and HIV education are mandated to be told to youth in schools.

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Hanin: And also, like the existence of sexual violence prevention centers that provide tremendous and important services such as Aurora center.

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Hanin: And by the way, our helpline serves

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Hanin: So, by the way, like the helpline services are offered for people affiliated to the University of Minnesota, but also

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Hanin: we serve people from different states and we accept international calls via Skype as well.

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Hannah: I have you just a, I guess, a follow up question. Have you been transitioning a few of your services during like the COVID-19 pandemic. Have you been like doing more

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Hannah: telephone outreach or anything or Skype outreach?

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Hanin: Okay. Actually I... since like COVID-19, I had only one shift and tomorrow I will have another shift.

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Hanin: In that shift if I didn't get a phone call, but it's something normal like some days we don't try anything you don't get a phone calls, but also because I worked like during

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Hanin: The time that office is not open. So maybe they... during the day they already received calls but like during the night - because I have to be on call during the night - so maybe nobody just called.

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Hanin: But I cannot like speak other people because like every, each day is different. And like we don't have like the same rate of calls every day.

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00:34:00.750 --> 00:34:01.140

Yeah.

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00:34:02.400 --> 00:34:06.660

Hanin: Yeah. And the only thing that has changed that we used to

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00:34:07.770 --> 00:34:24.600

Hanin: Do respond to hospital calls but now we cannot go to hospital because you know the quarantine situation that we are in right now. So we don't do that right now, which I feel, I feel so bad, and we should we, we can still keep doing that.

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Abby: Um, our last question for you is, how can people become involved in or support work in advancing reproductive justice within our healthcare system?

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Hanin: Yeah, I think this is a great question and I don't think that I am in the right position to answer this question accurately since I'm an international student

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Hanin: And that is still, like, I'm still in the process of learning about the complexity of the institution of structuring and how things work differently here in the US. However, I would like to say that, or I would like to urge people to take an advantage of their

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00:35:15.300 --> 00:35:18.420

Hanin: right to vote.

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00:35:19.650 --> 00:35:25.110

Hanin: Yeah, I would like to urge people to take an advantage of the right to vote and like

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Hanin: be aware about the political aspect in order to pose any for any efforts to pass banning abortion, for example, or any similar bills.

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Hanin: And also, like look for organizations that advocate for reproductive healthcare and try to see what, what are there ways that you can support them.

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00:35:44.820 --> 00:35:56.820

Hanin: For example, by donating or maybe just volunteering with them or maybe just like - just like reading about that and to educate yourself about that is maybe enough for you to be involved in that work.

[outro music Night Air]

HANNAH: Thank you so much, Hanin, for taking the time to speak with us. We hope that this episode has helped our listeners better understand the topic of sexual assault and misconduct on college campuses.

ABBY: Before we close this episode, let's return to our quiz. Hey Hannah, what's your answer to our quiz question?

HANNAH: Well Abby, according to the Guttmacher Institute, it turns out that 37 states in the U.S. currently require young people to obtain parent or guardian consent in order to receive an abortion. I guess this is a barrier for teens, and just goes to show how important reproductive justice work is.

ABBY: Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *Perspectives*. We would love to hear your thoughts and reactions to this episode. Please connect with us on Twitter or Facebook with the tag @pubhealthreview.

Resources:

Aurora Center for Advocacy and Education: <http://aurora.umn.edu/>

We Speak About It: <https://wespeakaboutit.org/affirmative-consent>

Changing The Reproductive Rights Conversation | Jessica Waters | TEDxBaltimore:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L_zczCuodw

Violence Against Women Act | Reauthorization: <https://nnedv.org/content/violence-against-women-act/>