



FAMILY SCIENCE & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Department Newsletter

APRIL 2025

“Denim Day” Campaign = Sexual Assault Prevention

In 1999, the Italian Supreme Court overturned the rape conviction of a 45-year-old driving instructor because his 18-year-old victim was wearing tight jeans. The justices (all men) ruled that the teen must have helped the attacker remove her pants, thereby implying consent.

Worldwide outrage followed the victim-blaming ruling. In Italy, female politicians protested the case by wearing denim jeans to work and carrying signs that read *Jeans: An Alibi for Rape*. This inspired Peace Over Violence, a California-based sexual violence prevention organization, to launch **Denim Day**, its flagship international campaign during Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April.

Montclair State University’s Denim Day, scheduled for Wednesday, April 30 at the amphitheater, will feature victim stories, DJ music, arts and crafts, and a campus walk. As one of 30+ partners of the event, the Family Science and Human Development Department will be tabling with denim giveaways and a bracelet-making activity.

On Denim Day, we will join millions of people across the

world by wearing jeans with a purpose, supporting survivors, and raising awareness about all forms of sexual violence. We can start today by understanding myths and realities about rape, and taking steps to eliminate rape culture:

1. Recognize that people neither deserve nor ask to be abused, harassed, assaulted or raped—ever.
2. Believe and support survivors of sexual violence.
3. Challenge victim-blaming statements.
4. Constructively explain why comments and jokes that perpetuate rape culture or sexism are not okay.
5. Educate yourself and others about what it means to get



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Department Chair’s Corner

Alas - it’s April, the month when we usually can stop the guessing game of whether our thick winter coats should be stored away or not (they should). I hope with the warmer weather and longer daylight hours, you feel a renewed sense of peace, growth, and reflection in your academic journey - and in your personal one as well.

For scholars like myself who conduct research in the field of intimate partner violence, April always stands out because it is also **Sexual Assault Awareness Month**, a dedicated month to raise awareness, support survivors, and take action against sexual violence. Much like intimate partner violence, sexual violence is a global health issue that impacts millions of women and girls worldwide and has a serious effect on individuals, families, and communities. Unfortunately, college campuses are not

spared. As a department dedicated to social justice, education, and advocacy, we believe and stand with survivors, and commit to creating a responsive community where everyone feels safe, respected, and heard.

This year, FSHD is partnering with Montclair’s University Police Department, the Office of Advocacy and Community Resilience, and the Office of Social Justice and Diversity, and participating in their resource fair and one-mile walk on Denim Day (April 30th) as well as planting a pinwheel garden by the south entrance of University Hall. We do so in the spirit of honoring our collective responsibility to prevent harm and promote a culture of consent

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Dr. Lyndal Khaw

DATES TO REMEMBER

April 18-20

Easter Holiday—no classes

April 30

Denim Day

Student Spotlight

Sana Awad

Sana Awad is a senior Family Science and Human Development major with a concentration in School Settings, graduating in the spring of 2025.



Her Story: My journey as an FSHD major has been shaped by my experiences as a single mom who built herself from the ground up. Balancing school, work, and parenting was not easy, but I stayed determined to create a

better future for my children. I wanted to become a role model for them — someone they could look up to and be proud of.

At one point, I found myself in need of support, and through a human services organization, I received the guidance and resources that helped me get back on track. That experience inspired me to pursue a career in human services so I can help others achieve success and overcome their own challenges. My goal is to empower people to see their potential and believe in their ability to thrive.

Her Plan: My goal is to become a social worker or counselor, focusing on supporting families, especially women and children. I plan to continue my education by pursuing a master's degree to build my skills in advocacy, family support, and mental health counseling. Through my experiences volunteering at a community Islamic education center and community service field through my job, I have learned the importance of connecting with people from diverse backgrounds. These experiences have shaped my commitment to fostering inclusivity and providing resources to underserved families.

Her Thoughts: Challenge yourself to explore new opportunities and expand your learning. Every one of us has unique potential, but sometimes we underestimate our own abilities. By believing in yourself and recognizing your true value, you can achieve far more than you might think. Trust that your knowledge and experiences are greater than you realize, and with dedication and effort, you can continue to grow and succeed. ■

Social Justice Initiatives

Black Maternal Health Equity

By Rebecca Swann-Jackson, PhD, EdM

In last month's newsletter, I shared that I am leading a team collaborating with the New Jersey Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority and experienced doulas. Our goal is to design a curriculum for full-spectrum doulas aligned with Nurture NJ, an initiative dedicated to ensuring equity in maternal and infant health outcomes for Black and brown women while reducing maternal and infant mortality and morbidity across the state.



It may come as a surprise that New Jersey has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the nation (GIWPS, 2020). As a Black mother who experienced two high-risk pregnancies, this issue is deeply personal to me.

[Black Maternal Health Week](#) (BMHW), April 11-17, presents a great learning opportunity for everyone. I encourage FSHD students, faculty, and staff to explore this critical topic—whether through coursework, research, or community engagement. Your passion and curiosity can help drive meaningful change in maternal and infant health.

Led by the [Black Mamas Matter Alliance](#), BMHW is focused on building awareness and amplifying the voices of Black leaders throughout the country who are working to end maternal mortality and racial disparities in health care. This year's theme is "Healing Legacies: Strengthening Black Maternal Health through Collective Action and Advocacy." The theme highlights the leadership and expertise of Black community-based organizations, aiming to achieve transformative and sustainable improvements in Black maternal health.

The Central Jersey Family Health Consortium is hosting its conference, *RISE UP! Advancing Black Maternal Health Equity in New Jersey*, on Thursday, April 10 in South Brunswick. Details with registration and vendor information can be found by [clicking here](#).

Now in its third year, this transformative event continues to make a profound impact by educating, empowering, and inspiring participants. It drives meaningful advocacy and fosters transformative change in Black maternal health equity and reproductive justice. By uniting community leaders, health professionals, advocates, and passionate individuals, the conference catalyzes collective action to advance equitable outcomes for Black birthing people in New Jersey. *RISE UP!* and be a part of this powerful movement for change! ■

Rebecca Swann-Jackson is a PhD alumni representative on the FSHD Social Justice Advisory Board.

Our Achievements

Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban is an FSHD Professor and co-director of RYTE, the university's Institute for Research on Youth Thriving and Evaluation. RYTE explores questions related to youth thriving, developmental science, and program evaluation and planning from a systems science perspective, and collaborates on interdisciplinary projects with other institutions and organizations.

Dr. Urban and RYTE members recently presented at the 2025 KPCEL Conference on Character and Equity for

Flourishing Communities sponsored by the Kern Family Foundation Partners in Character and Educational Leadership. Presenters included (pictured l-r) doctoral candidate Elaine Les, doctoral student Anglin Thevaraja, Dr. Urban, doctoral student Jaclyn Novak, doctoral candidate Yasmine Perry, and postdoctoral fellow Elyse Postlewaite.



Pinwheels for Prevention



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and the FSHD Department is doing its part to raise awareness on campus. Look for our twirling blue Pinwheel Garden outside University Hall. Pinwheels are the national symbol of child abuse prevention because they represent childhood, happiness and whimsy. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) enacted 50+ years ago provides funding to states to support the prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. During this month and throughout the year, organizations and communities are encouraged to increase awareness about child and family well-being, and work together to implement effective strategies that strengthen families and avoid child maltreatment. ■

Department Chair's Corner *(continued from page 1)*

and accountability for each member of our community. Each and every one of us on this campus has the power to make a difference—whether by educating ourselves, speaking out against harmful behaviors, supporting survivor-centered initiatives, or simply being a compassionate listener. Showing up matters. Believing survivors matters.

I encourage everyone in FSHD to take part in our department's upcoming events and conversations centered on awareness, prevention, and action. Together, we can promote a community that not only acknowledges the shortfalls or gaps in societal response to sexual assault but actively works toward solutions that promote a socially just and nonviolent world for generations to come.

On that note, I wish you all many insightful and productive weeks ahead until we reach the end of this semester. For our graduating seniors embarking on their final weeks of college this month, I hope you savor every moment and make the most of it! ■

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Sexual Assault Awareness

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and give consent. Consent is mandatory in every sexual interaction – no excuses.

6. Directly intervene or get help when you see someone taking advantage of a person who is incapable of giving consent.
7. Build and engage in healthy, respectful relationships.
8. Pledge to never commit or condone acts of violence.
9. Think critically about how the media depicts sexuality.
10. Take a self-defense class. Your mind, your voice and your body are powerful tools for prevention.
11. Teach your children, parents and peers about the myths and realities of sexual assault.
12. Donate time or money to your local rape crisis center.
13. Find your local school board's policy on anti-rape and violence prevention education. If it's not proactive, get involved and change it!
14. Lobby your local, state and federal legislators to fund anti-sexual assault programs.
15. If you witness sexual harassment at the workplace or in public places, expose the behavior. Don't tolerate it.

Rape Myths and Realities

Myth: Rape occurs in a dark alley by a stranger.

Reality: About 70% of sexual assault survivors know the perpetrator, often an intimate partner, family member, friend or acquaintance, including classmates, coworkers, dates, neighbors, and caretakers.

Myth: Rape is just 'rough' or 'bad' sex, it's no big deal.

Reality: Rape is a violent assault acted out sexually which affects an individual's sense of safety and control. Almost half of rape survivors are fearful of serious injury or death during the attack. Rape survivors are nine times more likely to attempt suicide than victims of other crimes.

Myth: Women ask to be raped because of the way they dress or act.

Reality: No one asks or deserves to be raped. This attitude holds survivors of sexual assault accountable for the violence committed against them. Rape happens because the perpetrator decides that his desires are more important than the victim's rights; it does not happen in response to provocative clothing or behavior. A life free from sexual violence is a basic human right that should be accorded to all members of our society.

Myth: It's okay for a man to force a woman to have sex if she gets him turned on.

Reality: This attitude suggests that men are not capable of controlling their sexual behavior, and that women must ultimately bear the responsibility for men's violent behavior. This is simply not true; people are able to control themselves when they choose. Any person that chooses to act out violently against another must be held accountable.

Myth: Women only cry rape to get back at men they are mad at, or because they don't want to admit having sex.

Reality: False rape charges are infrequent. According to the Department of Justice, only one in every 2.7 million heterosexual males will have a false claim made against him.

Myth: Men can never be sexually assaulted.

Reality: One in six males have experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. ■

**DENIM
DAY**
INFO.ORG

**SEXUAL
VIOLENCE
PREVENTION
AND EDUCATION
CAMPAIGN**

**THERE IS NO
EXCUSE
AND NEVER
AN INVITATION
TO RAPE**



**THERE IS NO
EXCUSE:
SHE WAS WEARING
TIGHT
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Source: DenimDay.org