Avery Martin:

Welcome to Health and Human Science Matters, a podcast by Colorado State University's College of Health and Human Sciences. I'm Avery Martin, co-host and digital media strategist.

Matt Hickey:

And I'm Matt Hickey, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies. In our college, we make it our mission to optimize human health and wellbeing through discovery and innovation. Don't just take our word for it. Each episode, we sit down with people who fulfill that mission, our college faculty and staff.

Avery Martin:

Today, we're speaking with Dr. Mohammed Mehany, Associate Professor in the Department of Construction Management at Colorado State University. Content warning, this episode briefly discusses the mental health crisis and suicide. If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 988.

Matt Hickey:

Mohammed, welcome.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Avery Martin:

Well, we're delighted to have you.

Matt Hickey:

And as we were talking about in the intro, we want to get to know you as a scholar, but also of course get to know you as a person, what interests you outside the life of the academy. We want to start with your research program and ask you to talk about sort of big problems or big challenges that your research attends to.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Awesome. So, now that I'm associate professor for several years now, things shifted a little bit, and I'm very grateful for that. So, the biggest two things that I'm addressing right now is infrastructure sustainability and resilience, which is something that as easy as just go to a ACE report card and you'll see how bad it is now and there's a lot to be done. It's a big country, big infrastructure systems, mostly also around the world as well. Some of the work that I do can be applied all around the world. It's not just for the US.

And the other big portion now that just became to be in the last two, three years is the mental health for construction workers. It's a very, very big problem and it's almost like a pandemic toward the industry of construction. It used to be the big force, which is like the Fatal Four, they call them, the falls, electrocution, struck by and caught in between, I guess.

And guess what? Actually, sadly, mental health issues and suicide is number one. And construction actually is ranked first or second in industry. No, it's not fun to say, but that's what it is. And that is why it piqued my interest a lot. And it became all of a sudden without me realizing a big portion of my research now that I'm trying to get more and more, and there's a lot of it of over just reaching out and making more awareness by being keynote speaker or something. But a lot of it also, I'm trying to get as much as I can research into that area and trying to get hopefully a research team together for that.

Matt Hickey:

Because it's very much a big problem, obviously, given the statistics you just shared with us.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It is. It is. It is. And it's something that a lot of us did. I'm in the construction industry, I don't know. I didn't know that before it came to me by mere coincidence, literally.

Matt Hickey:

But you're paying attention to what's going on.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah, thankfully I did. Thankfully I did.

Matt Hickey:

I want you to tell us a little bit more about what you mean when you talk about infrastructure. Are we talking about highways and bridges or hundred-story buildings or?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Infrastructure, it's one of those words that get thrown around and I can understand why it can be used very widely and interchangeably because the language part, the linguistics part of it is like, yeah, everything is an infrastructure for something, but really, we'll focus on let's say the facilities that support civilization life as we know it. And that is why infrastructure will mean to me exactly what you said. Pick things like roads, bridges, dams, things of that nature. That without it, there's a lot of, all those fancy buildings that we have can't even operate without electric grades, without all of these. So, that's really my focus.

And I think it's just a very impactful thing for me to do that I enjoy it. And I'm biased a little bit because I grew up in the construction industry and most of my life, I worked actually on infrastructure projects, life before academia.

Matt Hickey:

Sure, sure.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

And I grew up in it as a kid even. I didn't actually touch buildings much except in college. I know it sound crazy. "SO, you were working before?" Yeah, I was. And I still enjoy it as of very intriguing projects to me, more than buildings or even the fanciest buildings, you can say I'll stick with the road with the asphalt and the concrete on it.

Matt Hickey:

Interesting.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

For me, it's just a different beast to deal with and very different circumstantial, very risky kind of environment. But it's fun.

Matt Hickey:

That's great.

Avery Martin:

That's awesome.

Matt Hickey:

Well, we're going to talk more about all these things in a few minutes.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Sure.

Avery Martin:

Yeah, yeah. Or now, honestly. Tell us a little bit about your intro to the construction industry and all the way back to childhood, however far you want to go back. What's the origin story?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah. Let's hear it from the beginning then. Okay. So, going all the way back, I was literally, I know people can see, but how big is this table? A couple feet. So, I was like that little of a kid, really little. And I used to go to the job site on my job and I literally took it as a job was, "Hey kiddo, go grab this shovel. Go get some food. Go get some water for the foreman." So, I grew up really in it and I'm very grateful for that, honestly.

Avery Martin:

And where was this at?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

That was back where I'm from, actually, which is Cairo, Egypt. That's where I grew up. So, it was sometimes in Cairo, so outside of Cairo, still in Egypt. So, yeah, I went there and did just anything they need. And I was in it. So, I'll tell you what, it's funny because I remember now, I used to walk about two miles or something, like three kilometers plus to just get the bread and cheese. I remember exactly, bread, cheese, grapes and stuff like that. And haul them back to the-

Matt Hickey:

No kidding.

Avery Martin:

Wow.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

... to the laborers and allowing lunchtime and stuff like that for their break and sit and eat with them. And they teach me stuff. And it was really great. It was very different childhood from the norm and I'll say that, but it was good, too. I really enjoyed it.

Matt Hickey:

It's so interesting, isn't it?

Avery Martin:

Yeah. Apprenticeship of sorts that early.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah, it's just like, so when I grew older, it was very easy to manage crews and superintendent, everybody around me because I grew up in it. So, I know how people think, how they like to be treated, how you can empathize with some certain things that you can't see if you never been there with them in the trenches and how people react to things, what is their own responsibilities.

And it's very hard. Even if you're the best coming out of school or something, it's just hard. You've never been there. It is very different lens when you are with them, they talk about their own lives and how work become part of their life. So, you can relate to that when you're dealing with them later and you can know how to incentivize them, you can know how to take care of them. It's always a big asset to be honest with you, learning that as a very young age.

Matt Hickey:

Did you get embraced by these guys right away? Or was there a standoffish period or did they just say, "Come on," and put you to work?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

No, I was a kid, so there was not much standoffish. It's kind of cute, right?

Matt Hickey:

Yeah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Across different cultures, it's cute. It was a little kid just doing all that and he's like acting up like he's one of us.

Matt Hickey:

That's it.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It was like, "All right, kid, let's go on." It's different culture. So, over there, for example, your little kid in the supermarket and you're grabbing something, I'm a total stranger. Just grab your kid, put him in the air and literally play with him and stuff like that. And he's like, "Hey kiddo," and that's fine. Here, I don't think you can do that here.

Matt Hickey:

Unfortunately, but you're right. Yeah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, yeah, so that is kind of the culture there. So, it was kind of exactly that. It was like, "Hey, little kid trying to be working with us," and stuff like that. So, it's like, "Okay, kiddo, do this, do that. Grab this, grab that." And so, when you grow up with them and it's like you're one of them in a way, which is fortunate and very good.

Matt Hickey:

So, translate this really early apprenticeship into an educational pathway, right?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah.

Matt Hickey:

So, degrees you pursued and-

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Oh, my. That's another thing. As a matter of fact, even though I grew up in it, by the time you get to high school, then you're going to have to pick where you're going to go. And I actually, believe it or not, did not want to do engineering at the time. I wanted to be a pharmacist. Here you go. Here's another one.

Matt Hickey:

Interesting.

Avery Martin:

Okay.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yes. I wanted to be a pharmacist and I remember everybody was like, "Dude, you grew up in this thing. You don't want to do this?" "No, I want to be a pharmacist. I love chemistry." I love chemistry and I wanted to be a pharmacist or a chemist or something. And it didn't happen because over there, it's not like here. It's by percentages to get into a university. Can you imagine 96.5% is not good enough to get you in the lowest pharmacy school in the entire country?

Avery Martin:

My goodness.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

My year, the lowest pharmacy school in the entire country took 96.7%. It was just, "Really, guys?" It's crazy.

Matt Hickey:

Yeah. No kidding.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Some people had to get 98.9 or something like that to get in certain highest pharmacy schools and stuff like that. It was kind of crazy. So, yeah, I remember that very well. I remember being very, to be honest with you, devastated about that. And my father, he was a great father, but it's different. When you're there, if one hour will make you $10 here, maybe 10 hours will make you the $10 there. So, you had to work a lot. And he was out there working most of the time. So, I didn't get to see him as much as I would like to be. But he was a great father. He did everything to support us and I'm extremely grateful for that. God bless his soul.

But in the meantime, sometimes he literally asked me. I'm not exaggerating one bit. He was like, "Hey, what grade you're in?" It never affected me negatively. I never looked back at it like, "How come?" No, he was busy doing his thing and trying to support us. I understand that.

But I remember because it was high school and going to college now, and it was a milestone, so he had to know. So, he's like, "Hey, kid, what are you doing with that pharmacy stuff? Come on." Because he's an engineer. So, he's like, "Go to engineering. It's good for you. You're meant for engineering." I'm like, "Dad, I don't like..." He's like, "[inaudible 00:09:38] engineering." I always had good grades in math and everything, and I liked math, but I never loved it. It's not like, "Oh, man, I can't wait to do this." And math was just a kind of, it's not something I-

Avery Martin:

It's like a passion.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah. It's not my passion.

Matt Hickey:

But thank God you had the gift, at least, right?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah. So then, I was like, "Fine, I'll try the engineering thing, whatever." And I had to go and I went to school, which is one of the really good schools of engineering back home, but it was expensive. So, I had to get on that scholarship at some point. And I was very thankful, too. It's the only one scholarship. If you don't get it, you're done. One full scholarship, everybody's competing for one. I got this and I never looked back and it was rough. And it was rough because I'm working. And by the way, also, I was also an athlete, semipro athlete and stuff like that. So, it was hard to do all of this and working and going to college.

And then everybody else who might not be working, which is only studying, competing with you on this. So, it was like, "Ah, get off me" kind of thing. So, it was kind of rough, to say the least.

Matt Hickey:

Now, tell us about your athletics.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, I grew up playing soccer, football. I mean, Ecuadorian football. It's just a tease, but which we call here soccer, grew up playing that. I mean, you could be playing the street growing up. But then when you grow up, it grow up with you of course. So that we have street leagues and stuff like that. And at some point, wanted to go pro. And that was interesting, too.

But then even no matter what, I will never leave the street leagues because there was something about it. And by the way, you can get in trouble if you're pro and you play in street leagues.

Matt Hickey:

Oh, I can imagine. Yeah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Because the people [inaudible 00:11:17] or stuff like that.

Matt Hickey:

Violating your contract.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah. And if you get injured and stuff like that. But man, you always want to play with them. So, even people who play pro still play the streets a little bit here and there. It was really something. It was a lot of fun. I really appreciate it. And martial arts, I also played martial arts a lot. I don't want to brag, but I was three-time national champion. Yes.

Matt Hickey:

Wow. Yes. My goodness.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah, it was a long time ago.

Matt Hickey:

So, you were busy.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

I was busy. I was a hyperactive kid.

Avery Martin:

They gave you something to do.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

I have to get busy, man. I'll drive them insane. It was a lot.

Matt Hickey:

You were a handful, huh?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yes. It was just hard to just sit down. I can. So, I'll go out in the street from the very morning if I can, and they'll just have to call me out like, "Hey, come back home." I'll be coming home 9:00 PM. And they were like, "Yeah, he's tired now, so he's going to go." And I'm like, "I don't want to go sleep. I want to play more."

Avery Martin:

You're still going.

Matt Hickey:

So, when World Cup time rolls around, are you glued to-

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Oh, my. First World Cup ever, I will never forget, was Egypt against Netherlands. And at the time, Netherland was laying top three in the world, so they were expected to beat the heck out of Egypt. So, I was like, "Man, I hope we just play good." I was literally still a very, very little kid, but it's something that all of us want to see. And actually, they tied and it's almost as if we won. Everybody was like, it's as if we won the whole thing.

Matt Hickey:

Yeah, good memories, huh?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

That was my first ever. Yeah.

Matt Hickey:

So, the engineering undergraduate, was there a moment when you started thinking about, "I want to go to grad school. I see myself at Colorado State." I'm kidding about that part, but-

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Never, never. Honestly, I'm just being honest. Honest, never ever I would have ever thought that I will be a professor one day. I mean, you can even tell by my demeanor, no, I'm not really a professor. I mean, your typical one I guess, or the stereotypical one. So, I wanted to be a contractor and I was.

Matt Hickey:

So, tell us about that.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, actually even before college was ended, I already had my company and we were not just doing, "Oh, a small job here, a small job there." We were like contractors. We'll go bidding on jobs and stuff like that. Like big jobs and everything. So, I was lucky. This is part of the thing that we were talking about that very odd, crazy kind of childhood of working around laborers and people and stuff like that earned me also a really good relationships and networks. So, when I got to be a contractor, I don't have to have the capital to do it. There was a lot of it. Trust. I know you. I know this kid since he was literally a kid and he's still in their eyes, still a kiddish.

Avery Martin:

Sure.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

And over there, age really matters. And the elders and stuff like that is a little bit different than here. But did some of those jobs that raised really good capital very, very early on and became contractors.

Matt Hickey:

And this primarily in Greater Cairo or all over Egypt?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

I worked in Cairo. I worked in Alexandria. I worked all the way to Upper Egypt. It was all over the place.

Matt Hickey:

Yeah, cool.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah, yeah. But it was mostly Cairo and Alexandria when I was still in college. And then after that, I was like, "Okay, let's get that company bigger." So, it was me and two or three partners. And it was funny because sometimes, it would show up in a bid meetings and stuff like that. And for them, they were kids, "Who are this kid, barely 20 years old sitting across from us bidding, what the heck is this?" It was kind of hilarious. And sometimes I win the job. And in a good game kind of thing, somebody would come and tap me in the back is like, "Hey, say hi to dad." They think that my dad sent me there and I'm just working with my dad and I'm like, "Do you know my dad?" Also, sometimes maybe he does know my dad, right? "So, do you know my dad?" He's like, "No, but the owner of this company." "No, that's my company." And all of a sudden the look is like, "What?" It was fun. I'm not going to lie, I enjoyed a little bit.

Matt Hickey:

No kidding, my goodness.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It's kind of fun.

Matt Hickey:

So, the switch towards an academic trajectory...

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Came by mere coincidence. My last year in college, CSU actually in construction management department, had some kind of collaboration program, like a collaboration/competition between CSU and my Arab Academic Science and Technology, AAST. So, one of my professors came as like, "Hey, we want to put the team together to do well." And so, my luck, even though I wasn't in the time in it, but it was more challenging because I didn't know about it as much financial management topic. That was my topic. And I was like, "You know what? I don't know about it, but let's accept the challenge and go at it. So, let's do this."

But then it was very interesting because it's the US. And I'll be honest with you, man, a lot of countries, not just Egypt, but all people are like, "Oh, man, it's America. Whoa. It'll be so hard. They would destroy it. So, let's beat them to it. Let's try our best to do this, because we're going to get beat, but at least let's ..." Just like Netherland and Egypt. Remember that?

Matt Hickey:

Yes.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

That's like the soccer game kind of thing. So, it was like that it was like, "Uh-oh, here it comes." And we presented and we're really, really good. Actually after the first like, "Oh, we're good."

Matt Hickey:

Oh, that's great.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, we did very good. And then they flew to us. It was maybe you remember Mustafa Khattab?

Matt Hickey:

Oh, sure, yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Amazing man. And I have the luck to have him as somebody to look up to when he came in. And also, when I was here, I even worked for him for at least a couple of years when I came in two, three years. And Angela Guggemos.

Matt Hickey:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

... who is one of the best people I've ever met. She is an amazing woman. So, they came in and at the end of the day, I can't remember which one of them said that, but they said, "Hey, if you think about grad school, we might have good opportunities for scholarships and stuff like that." And I'm like, "Yeah, thanks." I have a lot on my plate. I think about that. I'm working, man. That was really the whole thing. The best contractors we can ever be. We can expand in Sudan and some African countries and a little bit in the Middle East, too.

And we started doing that. We started doing some networking with some African countries and specifically Sudan because it was the backyard and they have good connections there. And we had jobs starting coming from Kuwait and have relationship from, at that time, Dubai was not what it is now, but at that time.

So, the trajectory was amazing. It was working very well. Then if I'm answering your question about how they get into academia, we're starting taking more project management jobs and consultant jobs and stuff like that. And it's way less risk and much more profitable. But if you have a doctor in front of your name, you can get much more and much better in this area. And contracting is not easy. After a while, it breaks you down a little bit.

So, okay, how about this other stream of revenue, which might be actually really good, but we have to have somebody that got a PhD on them. "Fine. Mohammed, you're the one who was top of school going to go back to school." And by the way, I already quit school. So, after I got my degree, over there you know how you can be here, you apply for assistantship or a RA-ship?

Avery Martin:

Mm-hmm.

Matt Hickey:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

You don't apply there. Over there, you're picked.

Matt Hickey:

Ah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, they will go and say, "Who's the top of the class? And then the second?" If they have a third, they will pick the third. If they have only one, they only take the first one. That's it. So, it's your luck of how far you are on the top of the university and how many openings at that year. So, I was number one. So, they took me. And after a semester or a year maybe, I quit on them, which is something that people were like, "Mohammed, you're insane. This is a lifetime of this and that. You cannot do that." I'm like, "Guys, I don't want to be in this. I'm a contractor for god's sake. That's what I do. I don't want to be in academia. Like, nah, I'm fine."

So, I already quit one time on that. And after that, now I'm like, "Huh, now I'm going to go back to this. Fine, I'll do it." But if you get a degree from overseas, specifically the US, that's very good. That's even more to your name. "So, fine, I'll go apply." And then while I'm applying, all of a sudden I received this call from a doctor, Dr. Mohammed Imam, who's a great, great man.

And he's like, "Mohammed, do you remember that CSU thing?" And that was like, "Oh, yeah." No, no. First he said, "Do you want to do grad school?" I'm like, "Did you read my mind or somebody told you already? I've already applied." He's like, "Remember the CSU people who came in?" I was like, "Oh, my goodness, I did forget about that."

He said, "They're offering fellowships and scholarships if you want to go there. I think they're good people and they'll be very good people to work with when you're there in grad school." And knowing him, when he says something, he really means extremely well for you. He's a very well-meaning person. So, I was like, "You know what, professor, just let them send me the offer, like what is it. I'm going to compare it with the others I got."

Avery Martin:

Smart move.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah. Contractor, right?

Matt Hickey:

Yeah.

Avery Martin:

Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, I was like, "I could pay it." And even if it's not as best, I'll still go because he said so. I trust his word. He's meant a lot to me.

Matt Hickey:

Sure.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, I did. And actually, it was a good offer, too. It was a full ride pretty much. So, I was like, "All right, I'm going." So, that's awesome. So, I was like, "Fine, we'll go to grad school there." That's how we ended up here.

Avery Martin:

Wow, just by chance.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah. So, I ended up here to finish as fast as I can. I actually finished my master's in one year because of that. And in my head, I was like, "Okay, I'm going to finish my PhD in two and a half years so I can go back quickly." That was how I ended up in grad school here, man. It was for one sole reason, get that degree and run back home so we can get some of that good consultant jobs.

Matt Hickey:

Interesting.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah.

Matt Hickey:

And yet here you are.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It's very interesting how I never planned on this or staying here or being a professor here or anything.

Matt Hickey:

So, your master's PhD, was it Mustafa as sort of a research mentor or?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

No, actually Mustafa's department head. So, I got the word from there. When you get there, that doctor, that professor who called me, Dr. Mohammed Imam, he said, "When you get there, work with Angela. She's good." Angela? Oh, my. She was the best, one of the most secure people, competent people. It was a masterclass and a masterpiece of what a good manager and advisee, too, sorry, advisor, too. I was lucky to have her, 100%. And I was extremely, I even called him back, I was like, "Thanks for that advice, man. This is going awesome."

Matt Hickey:

Yes, indeed.

Avery Martin:

That's great.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

And she worked with me and I remember even one time had some doubt was like, "Is that research meaningful?" "I don't know, it feels easy or not that good." And she sensed that. She can tell, I'm a little bit hesitant, "Is that really good?" And she went and pushed an article or something like some kind of problem statement or something from the Air Force trying to do what I'm doing in risk management issues at the time and it boosted my morale in a way.

Like, "Okay, I'm going to finish the degree, but my degree means a lot now. Oh, yeah, let's do this." It just clicked a little bit more and make me really go in the trenches for that specific topic without her having to sit me down. It's like, no, no. It was a simple push without telling me anything almost.

Matt Hickey:

Interesting.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

And then just by the look of the eyes were kind of like, "Gotcha."

Avery Martin:

That's awesome. That was really good.

Matt Hickey:

This is a perfect platform for a question that I really always enjoy asking about, the many influences I'm hearing on your life, people whose fingerprints you sort of still carry with you in terms of how you do your life, surprising as it may still be as an academic. So, talk to us about folks who when I'm in a classroom or I'm mentoring a grad student or whatever it might be, I can almost still hear them whispering in some ways, right?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Oh, my. So, I'll tell you what, I'm almost like a blender of a lot of things and thankfully also of different cultures. For example, I learned a little bit of honestly even some things I saw foremen do it and a superintendent do it growing up that I can sometimes use in the classroom. Believe it or not. There's a lot of social intelligence that you can know on the streets of Cairo, for example, or here of course, that is very interesting how you can take that in a classroom with you.

So, I try to mix them together. So, for example, you can definitely ask my grad students, I'm pretty rough off on them actually. I'm very hard on them productivity, this and that. I squeeze the heck out of them. But I also know a lot about them, about their personal lives. I didn't ask for that. They just tell me. And I'm very close to them a different way, too.

What I learned is this, if I'm very grateful for all those people who can have influence on my life, I even tell, especially my PhDs and stuff like that, "You better be better than me at some point. Seriously. I really seriously think that if you're not better than me, I did something wrong or you're doing something wrong. Somebody did something wrong."

Matt Hickey:

This trajectory is so fascinating that I don't want to forget talking about what do you do when you're not on campus. Before we sort of started recording, we shared some similar interests. So, for our listeners, again, what engages you?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

I climb almost all season long. So, we go climbing summer all the way until let's say, yeah, November is fine, good enough. And then, ice season kicks in. You can literally climb ice in Colorado even in September if you look for it. But then, all the way until cold r season that's more snow and high altitude mountaineering and stuff like that. And that's from about April, May that we go out climb all the way until June, July. Sometimes I'll travel. If you travel to Europe, you can do some June, July stuff there, like big mountains there and stuff like that. Or here in the Cascades.

And then switch back the whole cycle again and again and again. So, I try to climb a lot and it's fun and it's a very intriguing sport to me. However, I still kept one of my passions or one of my other sports other than of course football, which is diving. I love school diving, too.

Avery Martin:

Really?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

But that Colorado, that's the one thing I said, "If Colorado had a sea or an ocean, this would be heaven, man. That would be ridiculous." Because I used to dive. Actually before climbing, it was diving for me, so because over there, you have the Red Sea, which is amazing diving. So, I used to dive a lot and then I came in here, it's like there's not much diving. If you dive in Egypt, it's kind of hard to dive in other places.

Avery Martin:

I bet.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It's just so good, man. It's just so good to compete with that. I love diving. It's not as intense, of course, as climbing at all, but it's literally the one place my problem I can shut down my brain sometimes for better or worse. I'm one of those people who will go sleep and I'll wake up, it's like, "Yup. That thing." Even when I'm climbing, if I'm in the approach, I'm still thinking about stuff. That one place that can literally shut down everything, like everything and think about literal moment that I'm in is under the water. Yeah. Diving is just living in the moment for me.

Avery Martin:

That's awesome.

Matt Hickey:

That's quite an environment, isn't it?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It is. Yeah. You feel like you're not in this world anymore. And you're not really hitting the bottom of that. You're just like there.

Avery Martin:

Yeah. It's awesome.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It's kind of cool. So, I do that and definitely climbing is great because I guess I like a bit of misery in my life.

Matt Hickey:

Yeah, I can relate.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah, you can relate to that, right?

Matt Hickey:

Yeah.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

It's miserable. I don't know why we like that.

Matt Hickey:

But we forget it so rapidly, right? You know what I mean? Sometimes as you know, it's the summit moment, maybe the sun's coming up and you forget the last couple hours of freezing or whatever it might be.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

I know. It's just crazy. One time I'm belaying and it was like, oh, my god, it was almost negative 21, 22. That was awful. And I'm belaying somebody and I am in my belay parka, put it on. I'm still freezing.

Matt Hickey:

Shivering.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Like, "Man, this is not good. Why are we doing this? Why? This is insanity." And then, I lit the last pitch up, got up on the mountain, and I'm looking around and I'm like, "You know what?" I even come up to my friends. "It's worth, right?"

Avery Martin:

Yeah. This is why we did it.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

This is worth it. And I know people's like, "Hey, Mohammed, you can take pictures. You can always look at the pictures." I'm like, "Guys, I swear to god. It's definitely, definitely different." I was just climbing other weekend, I couldn't believe I'm seeing this, which is like, "Wow." Very rare moments and just soak it all in. And I'm not going to lie, I literally meant it when I said I like a bit of misery in my life. I think we're very comfortable these days. As human beings, our life is crazy comfortable. So, I don't know, a little bit of discomfort is fun for me or I don't know, just keep me in check.

And it's just amazing when you go back home and you're like, first of all, home, a shelter. When you're in winter storms all day and night, sometimes it's kind of rough. And then when you have this, you really appreciate a little bit more. I don't know, for me, it puts that backend picture for me.

Avery Martin:

Absolutely.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Sincerely appreciate the life a little bit more.

Avery Martin:

Great perspective.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah.

Avery Martin:

Wow.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

I think so.

Matt Hickey:

As you sort of cast your mind out five, 10 years down the road and you think about your legacy, colleagues, students, what would you like it to be characterized by?

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, working the work that we do now as professors, I think our work is reflected literally in the people that we bring out. Not just good people. I'm going to be honest with this. I want them to be competent, high work ethic, truthful, standing up for what is right and really standing up even if it's sometimes detriment to your career.

Matt Hickey:

Well said.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

If we can put out people who are competent, have competence, very important and good people of course have good work ethic and they really stand up for what is right are you really, really will be very content with that. That is pretty much let people tell your story at some point. They will tell your story. If you're good to people and you're doing everything right by them, those advisees or undergrads or whoever, don't worry about that. You will get your dues and they will tell you how you were kind to them, how you really benefited them, how you really looked out for them, how you built their character by just observing you sometimes.

That will come. I don't worry about what legacy might be as of this. I just worry about what I'm putting out there and hopefully, that will be my legacy at some point.

Matt Hickey:

Well said.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Thanks.

Avery Martin:

And I believe it will.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

I hope so. I hope so.

Avery Martin:

Yeah, it already probably is in many ways.

Matt Hickey:

I totally agree. And you carry the influence of folks that have touched you and I think that that sort of pay it forward mentality is beautiful. So, thank you. This has been so much fun. I don't want to stop. I want to keep talking, but-

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Appreciate it.

Matt Hickey:

We have to let you get along with the rest of the day.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah, and I'm sorry I didn't get into too much research. One time, we'll definitely talk about that and the research impact, because I have really good stories about the research impacts that it opened my eyes so much, especially the mental health stuff was really amazing.

Avery Martin:

I want to hear a little bit about that.

Matt Hickey:

Go for it. I have two minutes.

Avery Martin:

I think we need that.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Okay. Okay.

Avery Martin:

Yeah. We need a little bit.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

So, research impact, of course, there is the infrastructure stuff and that's a little bit more in the modeling side and stuff like that. So, I don't want to bore you with that, guys, but I'll tell you something about the mental health research that made me, even though it's the least funded area now for me, at least for now, hopefully it get better, but maybe say, "You know what, this is worth it."

I was invited to organize lecture session in TRB. It's the Transportation Research Board. So, I put together a panel for mental health. And we were doing this panel. And after that, some of the research and some of the resources and there's a lot of people from DOTs and everybody across the board is in there. So, I didn't think nothing about it. That was like 4:00 PM maybe, 3:00 PM, went just business as to usual.

The second day, we had a committee meeting. In the committee meeting, I'm part of the committees. We're doing how much research need statements we got to get out there, research synthesis. And we're all focused on that. And then all of a sudden, we're just saying ... Oh, we did also lecture session, which was very successful on mental health and that was really cool and just moving on.

And then, the guy raised his hand. He's from Alaska DOT. He's a good friend now. And he stood up and he said, "Thank you." I'm like, "Oh, appreciate it." I just thought he's talking about the lecture session. He said, "No, no, no, thank you. You don't know what happened that night." He said he got a call from somebody in Alaska that was on the edge almost going forward with suicide or as close as it gets. And he literally used the resources and things that we were talking about in that lecture station. Oh, my goodness, 3:00 or 4:00 PM and that is now the next day and he's telling me that. And I'm like, "Holy." I mean, we always talk about research impacts. If that was one person's life, that's enough impact for me.

Avery Martin:

Absolutely.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Seriously. I was like, of course elated but also shocked. It was a very weird thing that just came to my head it's like, "Uh-oh, this is really good. It's really bad. But then also, you know what? It's worth it. Push that agenda, man. And even if you're not getting funded as much as you would like now, it will come. Just keep the pedal to the metal." And I'm going to keep doing that as much as they can because really research impact is just right in my face of us. So, I'm very happy with that. I'm very grateful to get into this subject, which was by mere coincidence that we'll talk about after the podcast.

Avery Martin:

Thank you so much.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Yeah, of course.

Avery Martin:

This was great.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Appreciate it. Thank you, guys. Thanks, man.

Matt Hickey:

Really appreciate it.

Dr. Mohammed Mehany:

Thank you, guys.

Matt Hickey:

Another great interview is in the books. Thank you for listening to this episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Avery Martin:

Stay tuned for the next episode. It's on the way. In the meantime, go listen to our episodes from Seasons One through Four. And if you want to learn more about our College of Health and Human Sciences at CSU, go to www.chhs.colostate.edu.