NEWS RELEASE

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YOUNG ACADEMIC SECURES FUNDING BOOST FOR LOW VISION RESEARCH

New research into the street-crossing decision-making behavior by pedestrians with low vision and other visual impairments was given a funding boost today with the announcement of Dr Shirin E. Hassan, Assistant Professor at IU's School of Optometry, being awarded a $2 million research grant from the National Institutes of Health/National Eye Institute.

Principal investigator on the grant, Dr Hassan, said her research would evaluate the street-crossing decision-making performance of visually impaired, blind and elderly pedestrians in real, outdoor traffic environments. In earlier research studies, these high-risk pedestrian groups have been shown to make unsafe street-crossing decisions.

"In today's aging population there is increasing incidence of low vision. To support older adults and help them cope with the changes of aging, in particular with visual impairments and blindness, there needs to be increased efforts to improve pedestrian safety that will maximize an individual's independence and quality of life," said Dr Hassan.

Dr Hassan stated that her research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a current and typical, orientation and mobility (O&M) street-crossing training program that visually impaired and blind pedestrians often receive.

"The emphasis of my research is to improve the overall safety of high-risk pedestrian groups. My research will determine whether or not a street-crossing training program provides an older adult with low vision with enough scope and skill to cross a street confidently and safely," Dr Hassan said.

Beginning in August 2012 and over a five-year period, Dr Hassan will conduct a series of street-crossing experiments. Two of these experiments will determine how an individual's street-crossing decision-making performance changes with different road configurations and intersections; and whether an individual's perception of their street-crossing decision-making performance corresponds to their actual performance.
Dr Hassan said the importance of assessing street-crossing decision-making performance in-situ would also provide the framework for developing objective evidence-based recommendations for use by low vision optometrists and health-care professionals about when they should refer their patients for street-crossing decision training.

"The new recommendations will include information for low vision (LV) rehabilitation specialists and health care professionals to recognize early on when their patients should receive street-crossing training. It is the next critical step in patient care for people with low vision," said Dr Hassan.

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BACKGROUND

Dr Shirin Hassan is Assistant Professor at the Indiana University’s School of Optometry, Bloomington. She is also a qualified optometrist and low vision specialist having gained her PhD and Bachelor of Applied Science (Optometry) qualifications from Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

Currently, she lectures low vision to post-graduate optometry students and consults in the University’s low vision clinic.

From 2000 - 2007, Dr Hassan completed her post-doctoral research fellowship and later was promoted to Assistant Professor at the world-renowned Wilmer Eye Institute, at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

Dr Hassan has scientific publications in the area of low vision and street-crossing decision-making. Her articles have been published in national and international vision and traffic journals.