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FAU Study Finds 50% of Drivers Insensitive to Aggression toward Pedestrians

Ft. Lauderdale, FL (May 3, 2004) – A recent study conducted by Dr. Sheila Sarkar, assistant professor in the Department of Civil Engineering and Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Florida Atlantic University, addresses pedestrian safety on America’s roads. Before pedestrians cross the streets of Southern California, they should be aware of this study of 1,600 adult and teenage traffic violators. The drivers were shown photographs in which pedestrian safety was compromised by the environment or the drivers. In most cases, only half of the drivers considered the situations unsafe.

“It really surprised us that only 40% of the drivers in the study rated the situation very aggressive where a car was blocking the crosswalk, impeding the crossing of a pedestrian with a stroller,” said Sarkar. “In another situation, there were no sidewalks, and the pedestrians were walking in the bike lane on a high-speed arterial, and only 45% of our respondents found the situation to be dangerous.”

Teens in the study were more desensitized to the needs of the pedestrians than their adult counterparts. “While the reason for the lack of empathy toward pedestrians is not clear, it does make us think about whether the auto-dependent lifestyle is reducing the lack of understanding among our young drivers,” said Sarkar.

Aggressive driving toward pedestrians is a citable offense, but it has not been adequately brought to the attention of drivers. The study indicates that there is an imminent need to step up efforts to reduce rude and aggressive behavior toward pedestrians.

The study was a joint effort between Florida Atlantic University and California Institute of Transportation Safety at San Diego State and will be published this fall in *Transportation Research Record*.

For more information, visit http://www.civil.fau.edu/faculty_staff.htm#.