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Laurier PhD candidate earns Ontario Women's Health Scholars Award

WATERLOO – Bharati Sethi, a PhD candidate in Laurier's Faculty of Social Work, has earned an Ontario Women's Health Scholars Award worth \$20,000, which will support her community-based study investigating the link between employment and health as told from the perspective of immigrant and/or refugee women from the visible minority population.

"This award is indicative of the high quality and relevance of the doctoral research that Bharati is engaged in and that is supported by the Faculty of Social Work and the university as a whole," said Nick Coady, dean of Laurier's Faculty of Social Work. "Her research will develop new knowledge about the health of immigrant women, and this is intended to translate into more effective health services and improved health for this population."

Sethi is utilizing "photovoice," a research methodology that utilizes participant-generated photography as a means of data collection. The participants – selected from Grand Erie, Ontario, a mid-sized region about 40 kilometres outside of Brantford – are being trained to use digital cameras and upload their photos to a computer. During the study, Sethi will facilitate small group meetings to talk to the women about their photographs and how they relate to the research.

"If we're going to create change, we need to make sure that our research reaches the policy-makers and those who make decisions," said Sethi. "Photography is very powerful and captures nuances that you can't with words, particularly when there is a language barrier."

Sethi will also gather data from health care professionals, social workers and policy-makers through questionnaires and focus groups to examine their perceptions of factors that contribute to health disparities across ethnic groups. She is collaborating with the Immigrant Settlement Transition Employment and Partnership (ISTEP), a Grand Erie community task force composed of immigrant and community stakeholders.

At the end of the study, Sethi will host a photo exhibit in Brantford to promote dialogue among the various community stakeholders. She also plans to take the exhibit to other rural areas to inspire discussion about the importance of employment.

"I really want to show policy-makers that there are things we need to do about employment for these marginalized women, and show them how it is impacting their health," said Sethi.

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care established the Scholar Awards program in Women's Health to ensure that Ontario attracts and retains pre-eminent women's health scholars.

Sethi has earned many awards and scholarships, including a \$150,000 Vanier Graduate Scholarship to pursue her doctorate. In 2008, she became one of the first recipients of the Ontario government's Hilary M. Weston Scholarship, which recognizes graduate social work students for their commitment to mental health issues.