

RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT

FROM MOLECULAR BIOLOGY TO HEALTH EQUITY: EUNICE TUNGGALE'S RESEARCH JOURNEY

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Eunice Tunggal did not set out to become a health equity researcher. Her academic career began in molecular biology and genetics, where she imagined a future working in laboratory research.

But when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and changed university education, there were limited opportunities for hands-on laboratory work. Tunggal found herself questioning if that path was right for her. Rather than moving away from research as a whole, Tunggal began exploring a

EUNICE'S AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Disability and Gender

- The intersection of disability and gender pertaining to health equity

Digital Accessibility and Safety

- Ways in which digital research tools can become accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities, as well as women and gender diverse people with disabilities

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

- Experiences of women with disabilities in South Africa and Canada dealing with gender-based violence on digital platforms

Primary Healthcare

- Access to primary healthcare in Canada for women and gender-diverse people with disabilities

different way of asking scientific questions. Instead of focusing on cells and genetics, she shifted her attention to people and the barriers they face within societal systems.

Tunggal works as a Research Associate with the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Health Equity and Community Wellbeing (CERC HECW) at Toronto Metropolitan University. Her work focuses on disability justice, accessibility, gender equity, and health systems. Her research examines how structural inequalities shape people's experiences, with a specific focus on women and gender-diverse people with disabilities.

Her journey into health equity started when she landed a remote research assistant position with the Department of Family Medicine during her undergraduate career at McMaster University. She studied the administrative burden faced by family physicians caring for structurally marginalized populations.

The project challenged common assumptions about healthcare delivery by showing that many of the difficulties faced by family physicians are not created by patients themselves, but by health systems that fail to accommodate diverse needs. For people with disabilities, something as simple as requiring a longer appointment, accessible communication, or



additional accommodations can make accessing healthcare more difficult. Understanding these inequities sparked Tunggal's interest in research that examines not only individual experiences but also the policies and systems that shape them.

Her interest continued to grow through a CityLAB course at McMaster, where she collaborated with the City of Hamilton on affordable housing policy. Working alongside landlords, tenants, nonprofit organizations, shelters, city staff, and community stakeholders, she helped identify gaps in communication and barriers to accessing affordable housing.

These opportunities and experiences led Tunggal to pursue a Master's in Occupational and Public Health at Toronto Metropolitan University. During her graduate studies, she joined the CERC HECW as a summer intern under Professor Karen Soldatic. What started as an internship quickly evolved into a much larger role. She took on leadership roles for multiple projects and transitioned from being an intern to a Research Associate, continuing to guide many research projects.

Today, Tunggal's research reflects the interdisciplinary approach that first drew her to health equity. She is currently leading research examining technology-facilitated gender-based violence experienced by women with disabilities in



Canada, building on previous research conducted in South Africa. The project explores how digital spaces can become sites of harassment and exclusion while informing strategies that work to improve online safety and accessibility.

She is also helping lead research on access to primary healthcare for women and gender-diverse people with disabilities across Canada. The national project examines how people navigate healthcare systems and identifies opportunities to improve equitable access to care. As the research moves into its publication phase, the findings aim to inform future healthcare policy and practice.

Tunggal's motivation when conducting research stems from her experience working as a caregiver in a long-term care community, helping adults with a wide range of disabilities and complex support needs. Working in an under-resourced environment exposed her to the realities of systemic inequities that affected both residents and care providers. This left a lasting impression on Tunggal, and reinforced her determination to contribute to systemic change through her research.



In addition to her projects, Tunggal is also leading the second season of the Disability Dialogues podcast, helping translate research into accessible conversations that connect academic

work with broader audiences. While her research interests are diverse, Tunggal continuously strives to improve the everyday experiences of people who are overlooked by current systems.

This fall, she will begin a PhD at the University of Toronto, where she plans to continue her research. Her doctoral research will investigate how children and youth with disabilities navigate online spaces to learn about sexuality, bringing together many of the themes that have defined her work to this day, including digital inclusion, accessibility, health education, and equity.

Looking ahead, Tunggal hopes to continue her academic research and help build systems that provide equitable access to healthcare, education, and support for everyone, all through understanding people’s lived experiences to create meaningful change.

