

# Career Spotlight

BY ACTUA

# TOYIB OLANIYAN



## Toyib Olaniyan, Environmental Epidemiologist & Research Analyst

I'm an environmental epidemiologist studying how environmental factors like pollution affect our health. My job involves researching how things like traffic and industrial pollutants impact people's health and helping governments set safe health standards. This work is crucial to ensure that everyone, especially vulnerable groups, can live in a healthy environment. To become an environmental epidemiologist, I needed an advanced graduate degree and had to learn how to use spatial and statistical software which aren't typically taught in school. This field of study involves continuous or lifelong learning to stay on top of new changes and methods. Staying curious and committed to continuous learning has been key to career growth and development.

DIVERSITY  
IN STEM

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## **What challenges have you faced and overcome in your career?**

Continuous learning and training beyond formal academic settings are essential in my day-to-day work. Like any journey, my career path has had its bumps, but I use these challenges as motivation to keep moving forward. For example, being one of the few in the room in many situations can feel isolating. However, I see this as an opportunity to stand out and excel. Not all challenges are negative if you tap into the positive opportunities they bring. Embracing these experiences has helped me grow both professionally and personally.

## **What advice would you give to youth?**

My advice for youth considering future career paths is to understand what the day-to-day work of your desired career looks like. Position titles and accolades aren't as meaningful if the job doesn't bring you happiness or detracts from what you enjoy. Now is the perfect time to ask professionals in those fields about their daily experiences. The way we work is evolving, and today's jobs will likely change or expand into new areas. Being open to continuous learning is key. For example, in my role as a Research Analyst and Environmental Epidemiologist at Statistics Canada, I work with large data from various sources. Epidemiologists are now increasingly knowledgeable in fields such as geospatial science (geography), biostatistics, mathematics, coding, programming and social sciences. Embracing a mindset of continuous learning will set you apart and help you adapt to future changes in your career.

## **Why does diversity and representation matter in your field?**

Diversity and representation go beyond ticking a box, they are the foundation of innovation. Imagine being in a room with clones of yourself all day, you would quickly hit a roadblock in formulating new ideas and thinking outside the box. We leave ideas unexplored when our teams do not represent our diverse society. STEM is a unique field that requires intentional efforts to bring diverse perspectives to the table. As a researcher, we must be aware of and check our inherent biases. In epidemiological research, diversity and representation enhance the accuracy and relevance of findings, making them applicable to a wider range of people. This helps identify and address health disparities, leading to targeted interventions for equity-deserving groups. Diverse teams bring innovative solutions to public health challenges and inform equitable health policies. Inclusive research builds trust and encourages participation, resulting in more robust data and better health outcomes for all.