

PSY420HIS – The Science of Social Well-being

Instructor: Dr. Yeeun Archer Lee

Email: yeeun.archerlee@utoronto.ca

Office: Sidney Smith Hall (TBD)

Student hour: Tuesday 2-3PM / by appointment

<https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/3873365563> [passcode: 965382]

Class time: Wednesday, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Location: SK 222 (in-person)

Course Overview

This seminar course draws together the pressing social well-being issues we face today: Are we experiencing an epidemic of loneliness and social isolation? Are people becoming less caring toward each other? What are the impacts of increased online interactions on human relationships? Through the lens of social and health psychology, we will explore the drivers and implications of these issues for individuals' and society's flourishing. This course will involve reading and discussing relevant research articles with the aim of developing practical solutions to these issues. By the end of the course, students will be able to use the evidence discussed in class to propose interventions and policies that promote the population's social well-being.

The aim is that by the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Define different facets of social well-being comprehensively.
2. Articulate the implications of social well-being for individuals and society.
3. Critically assess existing evidence regarding the antecedents and consequences of social well-being
4. Identify key macro-level and individual-level factors influencing social well-being.
5. Apply scientific knowledge to formulate interventions and policies to promote social well-being.
6. Propose an “evidence-based” intervention (individual-level) or policy (macro-level) designed to elevate social well-being.
7. Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions or policies for social well-being.

Course Webpage

This course uses Quercus to share information about the course. This includes posting course announcements and updates, required readings as well as submitting course assignments and weekly discussion topics. New information and resources will be posted regularly as we move through the term. To access the course website, go to the U of T Quercus log-in page at <https://q.utoronto.ca>. Please also note that any grades posted are for your information only, so you can view and track your progress through the course. No grades are considered official, including any posted in Quercus at any point in the term, until they have been formally approved and posted on ACORN at the end of the course. Please contact me as soon as possible if you think there is an error in any grade posted on Quercus.

Readings

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, we will be reading a selection of two peer-reviewed journal articles per week. Weekly readings are listed at the end of this document (but it can be updated with advance notice).

Assessment

Class Participation (20%)

This course is an “interactive” seminar course. All students are required to attend the class in person and are expected to actively participate in and contribute to in-class discussions by actively listening, giving comments, asking questions, and sharing ideas. In the first class, we will establish ground rules for a productive and respectful in-class discussion. During the class sessions, I may call out your name and ask your thoughts.

Reaction Notes (20%)

All students are required to read two assigned papers each week before attending class. Throughout the term, students are required to submit reaction notes and discussion topics for “five” weeks of their choice between Week 2-10, except for the week they facilitate the in-class discussion. Both the reaction note and discussion questions should be submitted 24 hours before the class (by 1pm every Tuesday).

- I. Reaction note (15%): Each reaction note can be approximately 4-500 words and can include: i) comments connecting readings to real-world issues, ii) thoughtful critiques of the strengths or weaknesses in the paper, iii) further questions that are not addressed in the paper, and iv) application of ideas for intervention/policy. The purpose of these reaction notes is to train students to critically assess existing evidence and bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and real-world issues.
- II. Discussion topics (5%): Based on reaction note, students are required to post **two** main topics they would like to share or discuss with their classmates on Quercus. This could include comments or questions regarding the strengths or weaknesses in the papers, their connections to real-world issues, and implications for future research, intervention, or policy.

Discussion Facilitation (20%)

A team of two or three students will facilitate in-class discussion, which includes: i) providing a 15-minute summary of the weekly readings and connecting them to real-world issues (e.g., news article), ii) facilitating a 45-minute discussion, and iii) leading a 15-minute brainstorming session using an idea board (Miro) at the end of the class. Discussion topics will be formulated based on classmates’ questions posted online 24 hours before the class (by 1pm, every Tuesday). Discussion facilitators are encouraged to schedule a meeting with me to address any questions regarding the readings or to seek guidance on how to effectively lead the in-class discussion.

Final Project: Intervention/Policy Proposal (40%)

Throughout the course, students will propose one intervention or policy aimed at promoting the population's social well-being. Students can choose their target population and the focus and scope of the intervention/policy. The final proposal should include the following components:

- i) Background: why is this intervention/policy needed?
- ii) Goal(s) of intervention/policy: what is the target of the intervention?
- iii) Intervention/policy design: What does the intervention do?
- iv) Assessment: how will the effectiveness of intervention be assessed?; what are the expected outcomes of the intervention/policy?

The final project consists of three components:

1. 1-page initial proposal (3%; due Feb 21, 1PM) and a draft of the introduction and method of the final project (7%; due March 13, 1PM). This is to provide students with a mid-term review and feedback. Students are encouraged to attend office hours for detailed feedback on their initial proposal.
2. 5-minute speech (10%): Students are expected to present a brief overview of their intervention/policy proposal idea to classmates in Week 11 and 12 ("elevator pitch"). This provides an opportunity for feedback from peers.
3. Final proposal (20%; due April 5, 1PM): The final proposal should address all the components mentioned above in approximately 5 single-spaced pages (12-point font) and also include at least 10 references (not counting towards the page limit). More instructions regarding the final project will be provided during class.

If students find another classmate interested in a similar issue, they can form a team of 2 people to collaborate. However, in this case, their work is expected to be more substantial, and each team member should contribute unique components to the proposal (e.g., different aspects of the intervention or assessments). Teams are expected to give a 10-minute elevator pitch, and each team member is still expected to submit a separate proposal document. When considering forming a team, please reach out to me to discuss and finalize the details. I am available to provide guidance and ensure that the collaborative effort aligns with the expectations for the final project.

Bonus (up to 2%)

To compensate any missing marks, students have the option read one of the supplemental readings and deliver a 3-minute summary to their classmates (**one time**). This opportunity is available between Week 2 to 10. This can be a group effort, encouraging collaborative reading and learning among students.

Course Policies

Policies on late assignments & extension requests

The reaction notes and discussion questions will not be accepted after the deadline. For the final project (1-page initial proposal and final proposal), for each 24-hour period after the deadline, students will lose 10% on the assignment. An extension of deadline can be requested

for a documented, legitimate reason for late submission (e.g., illness, accessibility accommodations).

Generative AI policy

You are allowed to use a generative AI tool, ChatGPT, for two specific purposes in your final project: i) proofreading your writing and ii) information search, such as finding references and information for your project. However, students are required to develop their own ideas for interventions or policies based on the readings and in-class discussion. When using generative AI, you are required to highlight parts of your papers that are i) edited based on AI-generated texts (in yellow) and ii) directly copied and pasted from ChatGPT (in blue). Please be aware that this policy applies only to this course, and other instructors may have different views on the use of Generative AI.

Academic Resources

Accessibility needs:

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services/>. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will assess your situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

If students have accessibility needs that they would like me to be aware of and discuss, they are welcome to communicate with me directly. This can be done in person (after the class, during office hour, or by scheduling a meeting) or via email. Ensuring that every student has accessibility to the coursework is important to me, and I am here to support your needs.

Writing

As a student here at the University of Toronto, you are expected to write well. The university provides its students with a number of resources to help them achieve this. For more information on campus writing centres and writing courses, please visit <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/>.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

All students, faculty and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty when writing assignments and collaborating with fellow students. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism—representing someone else's work as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on

Academic Matters (<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>). If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources. For example, to learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see A&S Student Academic Integrity (<https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity>) and the University of Toronto Website on Academic Integrity (<https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>).

Specific Medical Circumstances:

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Religious Accommodations

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of cultural and religious traditions. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (such as a test or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

Grade Disputes

Following the return of assessments, students are required to wait for a minimum of 48 hours before bringing a grade concern to me. I expect students to use this time to reflect upon their performance and grade. Furthermore, any grade-related concerns must be brought to my attention within 14 days of the return of assessment. Please write a short paragraph detailing your grade concern, attach a copy of the original assignment, and email it to me. Only concerns that are reasonable and well-justified will be considered, and all decisions are final. Note that by agreeing to resubmit your work for remarking, you are also agreeing to a re-evaluation of the entirety of your work; as a result, your grade may go up, go down, or remain unchanged.

Other Resources Student Life Programs and Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/>)
Academic Success Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/asc>) Counselling and
Psychological Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>)

Weekly Topics and Readings

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	Jan 10	Course Introduction: What is social well-being?	
2	Jan 17	Are we in a loneliness epidemic? Roles of social well-being and global trends of social well-being	
3	Jan 24	Does technology promote or hamper our connections?: The role of smartphone, social media, and AI-powered robots	
4	Jan 31	How does our mind turn us away from social connection?: Psychological mechanisms of loneliness or social disconnection	
5	Feb 7	No class due to a conference <i>This class will be replaced by 10-minute one-on-one personal feedback session for students' final project</i>	
6	Feb 14	What makes a connected neighbourhood?: Neighbourhood built environment and social cohesion	
	Feb 21	Reading Week	Initial draft submission
7	Feb 28	Are we becoming less empathic to each other?: The role of prosociality	
8	Mar 6	Exploring the social well-being of various minority groups*	
9	Mar 13	Intervention I: Multilevel efforts to promote social connection*	Introduction and method
10	Mar 20	Intervention II: Evaluating the effectiveness of intervention research	
11	Mar 27	Student Presentations	
12	Apr 3	Student Presentations (Last class)	Final project submission due by April 5

*There will be a guest speaker with expertise in the weekly topic.

Weekly Reading List

Specific reading list can be updated with advance notice.

Week 1: Introduction (January 10)

Week 2: Are we in a loneliness epidemic?: Global trends of social well-being and consequences of social well-being (January 17)

*Students can choose between paper #2 or #3.

1. Buecker et al. (2021). Is loneliness in emerging adults increasing over time? A preregistered cross-temporal meta-analysis and systematic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 147(8), 787-805. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000332>
2. *Holt-Lunstad et al. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: A meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 227-237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>
3. *Hikichi et al. (2016). Can community social cohesion prevent posttraumatic stress disorder in the aftermath of a disaster? A natural experiment from the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and Tsunami. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 183(10), 902-910. [*https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwv335](https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwv335)

Supplemental readings:

- Twenge et al. (2021). Worldwide increase in adolescent loneliness. *Journal of Adolescence*, 93(1), 257-269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.06.006>
- Yu et al. (2023). Association of cumulative loneliness with all-cause mortality among middle-aged and older adults in the United States, 1996 to 2019. *PNAS*, 120(51). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2306819120>
- Is America suffering a social recession? <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/02/america-social-recession-less-friends-sex-mental-health>

Week 3: Does technology promote or hamper our connections?: The role of smartphone, social media, and AI-powered robots (January 24)

1. Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 3(2), 173-182. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1>
2. Nowland et al. (2017). Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(1), 70-87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617713052>

Supplemental readings:

- de Gennaro et al. (2020). Effectiveness of an empathic chatbot in combating adverse effects of social exclusion on mood. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 3061. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.03061>
- Geva et al. (2020). Touching the social robot PARO reduces pain perception and salivary oxytocin levels. *Scientific Reports*, 10, 9814. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-66982-y>
- Kushlev et al. (2019). Smartphones reduce smiles between strangers. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 91, 12–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.09.023>
-

Week 4: How does our mind turn us away from social connection?: Psychological mechanisms of loneliness or social disconnection (January 31)

1. Epley et al. (2022). Undersociality: miscalibrated social cognition can inhibit social connection. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 25(5), 406-418. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2022.02.007>
2. Cacioppo et al. (2015). Evolutionary mechanisms for loneliness. *Cognition and Emotion*, 28(1), 3-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2013.837379>

Supplemental readings:

- Kardas et al. (2021). Overly shallow?: Miscalibrated expectations create a barrier to deeper conversation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 122(3), 367–398. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000281>
- Dungan et al. (2022). Too reluctant to reach out: receiving social support is more positive than expressers expect. *Psychological Science*, 33(8), 1300-1312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976221082942>
- Archer Lee et al. (2022). The differential roles of chronic and transient loneliness in daily prosocial behaviour. *Psychology and Aging*, 37(5), 614–625. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pag0000681>

Week 5: No Class (Feb 7)

Instead, this class will be replaced by 10-minute one-on-one personal feedback session for students' final project

Week 6: What makes a connected neighbourhood?: Neighbourhood built environment and social cohesion (Feb 14)

1. Sampson et al. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277(5328), 918-924. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.277.5328.918>
2. Mazumdar et al. (2017). The built environment and social capital: A systematic review. *Environment and Behavior*, 50(2), 119-158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916516687343>

Supplemental readings:

- Wickes et al. (2018). Neighbourhood social conduits and resident social cohesion. *Urban Studies*, 56(1), 226-248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018780617>
- Mouratidis & Poortinga. (2020). Built environment, urban vitality and social cohesion: Do vibrant neighborhoods foster strong communities? *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 204, 103951. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2020.103951>
- Leyden et al. (2003). Social capital and the built environment: The importance of walkable neighborhoods. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(9), 1546-1551. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.93.9.1546>

Week 7: Are we becoming less empathic to each other?: The role of prosociality (Feb 28)

1. Zaki, J. (2014). Empathy: A motivated account. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(6), 1608–1647. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037679>

2. Shaw et al. (1994). Empathy avoidance: Forestalling feeling for another in order to escape the motivational consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(5), 879–887. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.5.879>

Supplemental readings:

- What happened to empathy?: We have become inured to human suffering. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/10/american-empathy-digital-isolation-humanity/675615/>
- Akinin et al. (2013). Prosocial spending and well-being: Cross-cultural evidence for a psychological universal. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104(4), 635–652. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031578>
- Schumann et al. (2014). Addressing the empathy deficit: Beliefs about the malleability of empathy predict effortful responses when empathy is challenging. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 107(3), 475–493. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036738>

Week 8: Exploring the social well-being of various minority groups (March 6)

2 readings TBD

Week 9: Intervention I: Multilevel efforts to promote social connection (March 13)

1. Lindsay et al. (2019). Mindfulness training reduces loneliness and increases social contact in a randomized controlled trial. *PNAS*, 116(9), 3488-3493. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1813588116>

2. Drinkwater et al. (2019). Social prescribing. *BMJ*, 364:1285. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.11285>

Supplemental readings:

- Sandstrom et al. (2022). Talking to strangers: A week-long intervention reduces psychological barriers to social connection. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 102, 104356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104356>
- Fong et al. (2021). Community-based approach: Evidence that loneliness can be reduced by a whole-of community intervention to increase neighbourhood identification. *Social Science & Medicine*, 277, 113909. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113909>

Week 10: Intervention II: Evaluating the effectiveness of intervention research

1. Bryan et al. (2021). Behavioural science is unlikely to change the world without a heterogeneity revolution. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5, 980-989. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01143-3>

2. Walton et al. (2023). Where and with whom does a brief social-belonging intervention promote progress in college? *Science*, 380(6644), 499-505. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.ade4420>

Supplemental readings:

- Ye & Aldrich. (2019). Substitute or complement? How social capital, age and socioeconomic status interacted to impact mortality in Japan's 3/11 tsunami. *SSM - Population Health*, 7, 100403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100403>

Week 11, 12: Student Presentations (March 27, April 4)