Social Determinants of Health and Child Development

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience

PSYO 4091 Fall 2026

Dalhousie University operates in the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Peoples. These sovereign nations hold inherent rights as the original peoples of these lands, and we each carry collective obligations under the Peace and Friendship Treaties. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Canada.

We recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies, and contributions have enriched the part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

Course Instructor

Name	Email	Office Hours
Instructor Dr. Rebecca Tucker PhD, Clinical Psychology	Rebecca.Tucker@dal.ca	Tuesdays from 2:00pm – 4:00pm Drop-in, Office on 3319

Course Description

This course focuses on the impacts of social determinants of health on child and adolescent development. Different social determinants of health are explored in relation to development (e.g., income, food insecurity, social safety network, social exclusion, education/literacy, childhood trauma, access to health services, sexual orientation, gender, disability, culture, racism, etc.).

Key knowledge or skills expected of students coming into the course
Fourth year undergraduate students completing an honours degree as well as graduate students in the department of psychology and neuroscience are welcome to take this course. It is expected that students will possess sound foundational knowledge relating to the science of human behaviour and development.

Course Prerequisites
PSYO 2090.03 or equivalent

Learning Objectives

The purpose of the course is to familiarize you with how a child's social environment can play a significant role in their development. The course is also designed to provoke thoughtful consideration to a child or adolescent's background and social history when working in a health or education setting. By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Describe and explain the social determinants of health
- Explain how and why studying social determinants of health is important to understanding child and adolescent development
- Describe the interplay of environmental and biological factors in child and adolescent development
- Discuss and evaluate the idea that environment and culture are “not simply context”.
- Critically evaluate developmental science research examining factors involved in development of neurodevelopmental, mental and/or physical health issues
- Describe ways to apply knowledge of the impact of social determinants of health on development to helping children and youth
- Demonstrate knowledge of developmental psychology concepts through effective written and oral communication
- Demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively with a team

Course Structure

In-person classes
Mondays, 8:35 – 10:25am in LSC, Room C210

The course will include a combination of lecture, in-class discussion and activities, and student-led presentations. Students are expected to participate actively in all aspects of the course.

Class Expectations/Conduct:
Please be aware that this is a class that allows for open discussion regarding potentially difficult topics. Students are expected to be respectful of everyone's opinion/feelings and to behave in an appropriate manner across all aspects of the course. Lively discussion and conflicting opinions are welcome and encouraged, but personal attacks, disrespectful comments, and any identity slurs, based on, for example, gender, race, ability, or religion will not be tolerated.

If you find you are troubled by material while taking this course, please see the instructor. If you find that you need support or counseling, please pursue external support by seeking out a supportive friend, counselor, and/or a social service. Students may access Dalhousie Student Health & Wellness Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness/services-support/student-health-and-wellness.html

Course Materials

Required readings
Students are expected to complete readings assigned by the instructor and/or classmates, which will be made available via Brightspace. Student-assigned readings will be uploaded to the appropriate discussion board no later than one week before each symposium.

Students should come to class having read the relevant articles as discussion and in-class activities will rely heavily on the weekly readings. Links to course readings and other materials will be available on Brightspace.

Brightspace Learning System
PowerPoint slides, relevant course documents, grades and important announcements will be posted on the course website. Please note: students must sign up for email notifications.

Kritik
You will also need to purchase a subscription to Kritik for $29, which is an online learning platform (https://www.kritik.io/). **The link to register will be provided via your Dalhousie email; please register using your Dalhousie email account**.

Technology Support
If you are having any kind of difficulties using the online platforms, please use the following contacts. I am here to answer any questions you have regarding the course but cannot help with any technical difficulties.

> If you require support for the course technology (Brightspace and Teams) you can contact Academic Technology Services (ATS) at intech@dal.ca
>
> For assistance with other university technologies, like your email, contact Information Technology Services (ITS) at support@dal.ca
>
> For assistance with Kritik please contact their support through the chat function on the website/platform (https://www.kritik.io/).

Assessment

Component	Weight (% of final grade)	Date(s)
Participation	20%	Weekly
Oral Presentations	50%	TBD
Written Reflections	Reflections: 20%	TBD
	Peer Evaluation: 10%	Due at midnight, or **approximately 9 hours in advance of class**

Participation (20%)
Students are expected to be active contributors to their own learning and to the learning of their peers. They will do this by sharing their thoughts, opinions, and questions during class discussions

and activities. Note: this will require students to come to class prepared by a careful and critical review of each week's readings (as provided by instructor and/or student presenters).

Oral Presentations/Symposia (50% total; 25% each)
Each student will conduct 2 presentations in a symposia format. Student teams of 2 - 3 undergraduate students and 1 graduate student will be responsible for **presenting on one social determinant of health and its impact on one or more areas of child and/or adolescent development** (e.g., cognitive, mental and/or physical health outcomes). Presentations should also address implications for working with children (and/or adolescents) in health or educational settings and/or for the larger community (e.g., government policies).

All presentations are expected to include a careful review of the theoretical and empirical literature relating to the chosen topic. Consideration should be given to including diverse authors and researchers. Students should be prepared to organize and attend planning meetings outside of class time. Student teams are welcome (and encouraged) to meet with the instructor to discuss topics and relevant literature, if desired.

Presentation class days will devote the entire class time to the symposia.

Oral Presentation Requirements:

1. Topic choices: You will form groups of 3 or 4 (1 graduate student and 2 - 3 undergraduate students) after selecting from 5 topics. **Topics will be posted on September 14th and you will choose your topic by September 16th**.

2. Length/Discussion each student will present for **no longer than 20 minutes: 15-minute presentation + up to 5 minutes for questions**, *allowing for time for facilitated discussion/questions at the end of each symposium (led by the graduate student)*

3. Articles each student team should provide their classmates with ***two relevant articles one week prior to their scheduled presentations***. All team members should provide suggestions for the readings with the graduate student(s) making the final selection and sharing them via the appropriate discussion board topic on Brightspace.

4. Format of Presentation 1) presentations should be in a Power Point-like format, however, students can use other style of presentation as appropriate; 2) research presented through slides should either listed on the slide or provided in a bibliography at the end of the presentation; 3) presentations should include material from several sources and not focus primarily on the article provided for class reading.

5. After Class each student should upload a PDF version of their presentation slides to the appropriate assignment box on Brightspace.

Please be creative! For example, presentations might include brief video clips or other engaging examples/materials relevant to the topic.

Grading will be based on the actual presentation of the material (ability to present material and engage with group), completeness/thoroughness of information presented (including use of relevant sources), and any written materials including slides. There will be a within group peer evaluation component on Kritik (worth 5/25).

Written Reflections (30% total; 20% your written reflections, 10% peer evaluation of others')
To enhance your learning and engagement with the readings for the course, you will be writing reflections on the readings. These reflections will give you a great opportunity to hone your skills in critical thinking, written communication, and articulating your perspective. In your reflections, you may choose to offer a critique, discuss the practical implications of the reading, offer further research questions, or draw connections (or disconnects) between the reading and previous articles or class discussions. Try to vary the kinds of topics you address across your reflections. You should only summarize as much as you need to from the original article in order to support the main point of your reflection. Make sure that the entire reflection elaborates on your main point in an in-depth way that shows a strong grasp of the article you are discussing.

For 6 weeks of class you are expected to write a reflection of approximately 250 words, submitted via ***Kritik,*** based on the topic and readings of that week. Your reflections must be submitted by midnight before the day of class (as per the deadline on Kritik). **Do not submit reflections for the 2 symposia where you are presenting or leading.**

Written reflections will be evaluated by three to four of your classmates/peers using *Kritik.* Both the written reflections and evaluations will be anonymized before grading. Your final grade for each reflection will be the average of the evaluations. **The lowest grade (out of 6 submitted reflections) will be dropped**. Students will receive feedback from each of their peer evaluators on the quality of their reflections, thus enabling students to improve their writing and critical thinking for the next reflection. At the same time, students will hone their own skills in providing effective feedback to support their peers' learning.

Conversion of numerical grades to Final Letter Grades follows the Dalhousie Common Grade Scale as outlined below.

A+ (90-100)	B+ (77-79)	C+ (65-69)	D (50-54)
A (85-89)	B (73-76)	C (60-64)	F (<50)
A- (80-84)	B- (70-72)	C- (55-59)	

Course Accessibility

It is important to know that students are eligible for accommodations based on protected characteristics such as religion. If you have religious, cultural, or community-significant observances that conflict with course requirements, reach out to me to collaboratively find alternatives for completing the course requirements.

To begin the process of requesting a formal academic accommodation, contact the Student Accessibility Centre

If you already have formal accommodations, I will take note of those as I receive the letters. Please reach out anytime if you have any formal accommodations that you need support to integrate into the structure of the course and/or if you think your accommodations have been missed.

Course Policies on Missed or Late Academic Requirements

Concern re: mark/grade
If you have a concern with a grade on an assignment, please document your concern(s) in writing and submit to Dr. Tucker. A meeting will be scheduled to address your concerns. All concerns must be raised within **two weeks** of the time when the mark is provided by the course instructor.

Late or missed assignments
For all assignments, one point will be deducted for each day late (i.e., if the assignment is worth 10 points, then handing it in one day late would mean that the maximum score would be 9 points).

Students requesting special consideration as a result of an illness or other conflict with a deadline for an assignment **must do so in advance of the relevant deadline and with appropriate documentation (e.g., Student Declaration of Absence form, formal accommodations plan).**
Make-up and/or prorating options will be developed on a case-by-case basis depending on the course component(s) missed and the nature and extent of students' difficulties.

For presentations specifically: if a student is ***ill*** *and not able to attend their presentation, they* **MUST contact their teammates and the instructor prior** to the presentation and **make alternate arrangements with the instructor for meeting the requirement.**

Course Policies related to Academic Integrity & Artificial Intelligence

While students are allowed to discuss the components of this course and ask/answer questions amongst your peers, **all assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise stated** (e.g., presentations).

Due to the nature of the assignments and the skills/knowledge they are assessing, **students may not use AI tools (e.g., Grammarly, ChatGPT) to assist with their coursework**. **Use of AI when it has been prohibited will be considered a violation of academic integrity.** Please contact me if you have any questions about this policy.

Tentative Course Schedule

Date	Content	Deadlines/Notes
September 14	Course introduction Syllabus review Getting to know each other What are social determinants of health? Symposia topics discussion	**Symposia topics posted**
September 21	Developmental research from a JEDI perspective Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model Culture is not simply context	**Choose symposia by September 16th**
September 28	Student Presentations 1	
October 5	Student Presentations 2	
October 19	Student Presentations 3	
October 26	Student Presentations 4	
November 2	Student Presentations 5	
November 9	**Fall Break**	
November 16	Student Presentations 6	
November 23	Student Presentations 7	
November 30	Student Presentations 8	
December 7	Student Presentations 9	
December 8	Student Presentations 10	

Note. **Some dates and some topics may change**

Syllabus Appendix

(Formerly University Policies and Statements)

Below is a link to the new “Syllabus Appendix”, which can help direct you towards up-to-date supports, university policies, and guidelines.

Syllabus Appendix: Student Supports & University Statements, Policies, and Guidelines