

Breakout workshop abstracts

International Conference on Social Identity and Health (ICSIH) 7, 24th – 26th June 2026, Exeter UK

The Social Curse in SIAH: Reflections on Trauma and Inequalities

Led by Dr Blerina Kellezi (Nottingham Trent University)

This workshop will explore current knowledge and emerging developments in social curse research, with particular attention to context of trauma, and inequalities.

Designing Identity-Smart Adaptation: A Social Identity and Health Design Lab on Climate Change

Led by Dr Stacey Heath (The Open University)

Climate and environmental change are reshaping not only the physical conditions in which people live, but also their sense of identity, belonging, and collective meaning. Flooding, heatwaves, relocation, and other forms of environmental disruption can threaten valued social identities, with important consequences for wellbeing, anxiety, trust, and engagement. At the same time, shared identity can provide a powerful source of resilience and collective coping. Despite this, identity-based processes are rarely centred in climate adaptation research or practice.

This interactive design lab workshop invites researchers working on, or interested in, social identity, health and wellbeing in the context of environmental change. Drawing on the Social Identity Approach, the session combines brief conceptual input with case-based discussions and a structured World Café format, enabling participants to explore how environmental change can disrupt or strengthen social identities, and how these processes shape wellbeing, engagement, and collective responses.

In the second half of the workshop, participants will work collaboratively to apply social identity concepts to real-world environmental change scenarios. Through facilitated group activities, attendees will explore how identity processes can be better recognised and incorporated into adaptation efforts, and co-develop shared insights and principles for supporting wellbeing and engagement in these contexts. The aim is to move beyond discussion to collective sense-making and to identify new directions for research and practice at the intersection of social identity, climate change, and health.

This workshop is open to researchers and others interested in applying social identity theory to health challenges arising from climate and environmental change.

AOD Use and Recovery Through a Social Identity Lens: From Theory to Practice

Led by Dr Zoe Walter (University of Queensland)

Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and recovery are fundamentally processes of identity change, yet this insight remains underutilised in research and practice, where biological and psychological frameworks continue to dominate. This workshop explores a social identity framework for understanding AOD use across its full cycle, positioning group memberships and shared identities as powerful resources for explaining and addressing initiation, escalation, dependence, and recovery.

Social identity theory adds explanatory precision to established evidence on the importance of social networks in AOD outcomes. It clarifies why groups matter: people think, feel, and act in line with the norms of groups they identify with, and shifts in identity can support sustained behaviour change. We outline two empirically documented pathways into dependence: one in which people lose valued social identities and escalate substance use to cope, and another in which socially isolated individuals find belonging through substance-using networks. Recovery requires more than behaviour change; it involves shifting away from identities and relationships that sustain use, toward social connections that support reduced use, abstinence, and wellbeing.

Building on participants' existing expertise in social identity, the workshop applies this lens collaboratively to AOD contexts. Combining theoretical input with structured practical activities, part one maps identity processes onto the AOD cycle, with particular attention to escalation, stigma, and recovery; part two engages participants in case analysis and intervention design. Participants will leave with a clearer conceptual framework, greater confidence in identifying identity-related risk and recovery processes, and practical strategies for AOD treatment and recovery support.

Rethinking the Measurement of Social Identity in Health Research

Led by Dr Laura Hollands (University of Plymouth)

Measuring social identity in applied health research is both essential and challenging. Standardised categories – often required for analysis and comparison – can reduce complex, fluid, and context-dependent identities to fixed variables. In practice, measures of social identity are often difficult for participants to interpret, may rely on constructs that do not resonate with everyday experience, and are sensitive to context and question framing. They can struggle to capture change over time, making them difficult to use as before-and-after outcome measures, and may sit uneasily alongside key principles of social identity approaches to health, which emphasises fluidity and context.

This interactive breakout workshop brings together health researchers to critically examine these challenges. The session will first highlight key tensions, including whether current measurement approaches align with theoretical assumptions. Speakers will then introduce alternative strategies, including observational, qualitative, and descriptive approaches.

Most of the session will be discussion-based, encouraging participants to reflect on their own research practices, share challenges, and collectively identify ways to improve current approaches. The aim is to generate practical insights into measuring social identity in health research.