Demographers and the study of mortality: What can we learn from a bereavement perspective?

The study of mortality is a major focus of demographic research. From micro-level analyses of mortality risks to macro-level studies tracking how these risks aggregate, our metrics and models of mortality tend to treat death as an individual outcome—a person’s final demographic event. In this talk I will argue that incorporating a bereavement perspective into the study of mortality—one that recognizes death events intimately affect the lives of salient others—can enhance our empirical and theoretical models of mortality. Specifically, I will demonstrate how a bereavement perspective can (1) rescale mortality conditions in a population; (2) improve theoretical models of the social and demographic relevance of mortality events; and (3) inform efforts to collect high-quality population data.