

24 - 26 July 2026

Copenhagen , Denmark

# **The Embodied Grief Model: An Emerging Framework For Loss, Stress, And Public Health Outcomes**

**Dr. Devin Thomas , Angelique M. Banks , MHA; Rabiya Amina MPP**

*Touro University, the United States*

## **Abstract**

Standardized grief models prioritize emotional and cognitive expressions of loss. But when social and cultural norms discourage visible distress (expectations of strength, productivity, and constant caregiving), grief does not disappear. It moves into the body. This paper proposes the Embodied Grief Model, a conceptual framework explaining how loss, social constraint, behavioral adaptation, and physiological embodiment combine to produce downstream public health consequences.

The model describes five sequential pathways: (1) loss and attachment rupture; (2) social and cultural constraints on emotional expression, which bereavement research links to psychological distress, loneliness, somatic symptoms, and poorer perceived health outcomes (Hilberdink et al., 2023; Eisma & Buyukcan-Tetik, 2025); (3) behavioral adaptation, specifically hyperfunctioning, intensified caregiving, and emotional suppression; (4) physiological embodiment, including chronic HPA axis activation, elevated cortisol, and inflammatory dysregulation (Pedrinelli et al., 2025); and (5) downstream health consequences including burnout, chronic pain, sleep disruption, and autoimmune conditions.

The central argument is that unresolved grief migrates when direct emotional processing is constrained or unsafe. It becomes behavior, then physiology, then disease. The Embodied Grief Model expands grief recognition beyond emotional indicators, offering public health researchers and clinicians a framework for identifying embodied grief across diverse populations where existing tools fail. The model is particularly relevant for populations facing cultural, occupational, or structural barriers to open grief expression, including communities where norms of strength, productivity, or emotional restraint discourage visible mourning.

**Keywords:** Behavioral Adaptation; Embodiment; Emerging Framework; Grief; Public Health; Stress