

# Patients and families who experience delirium report more distress than those who do not

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Researchers from Hebrew SeniorLife's Institute for Aging Research, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School, Brown University, and Yale School of Nursing have reported that patients who develop delirium (an acute decline of cognitive functioning) during or after a hospital stay report more distress than those who do not. The same goes for family members of patients who have experienced delirium - they also report more distress than family members of patients who have not experienced delirium.

To uncover these results, scientists administered the Delirium Burden (DEL-B) questionnaire to measure and study the distress caused by [delirium](#) in both [patients](#) and their families. They then weighed these results against questionnaires from patients and families who did not experience an episode of delirium. Researchers also found that caregivers experienced more distress when their loved one developed delirium than the patient themselves. Beyond this, they discovered that the severity of the delirium episode may also play a role in the amount of distress caused. The results of this study were published today in *The Gerontologist*.

Annie Racine, PhD, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Aging Research and first author of the study said, "We've known for some time that delirium is often a distressing experience for patients and their caregivers, but we haven't previously had a reliable and validated

way to measure or quantify that experience". Sharon Inouye, MD, MPH, Director of the Aging Brain Center at the Institute for Aging Research and senior author of the paper added, "These DEL-B questionnaires are an important step for the field, enabling measurement of the lived experience of delirium. We hope these instruments will help clinicians and researchers identify ways to make delirium less distressing both for patients and their families."

In response to this study, the authors suggest that an important goal going forward would be to understand which parts of the delirium experience make it so distressing, and find ways to improve the experience for patients and [family members](#) alike. The DEL-B questionnaire could be an important tool in subsequent clinical trials to help find solutions to the [distress](#) caused by delirium.

Provided by Hebrew SeniorLife Institute for Aging Research

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