



## A Study On Problems Of Breast Cancer Patients And Distress Level Measurement

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### ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

**Aim:** The aim of the study is to assess and identify the problems of breast cancer patients and their distress levels by using NCCN Distress thermometer scale. The study includes practical, family, emotional, physical problems and psychological management.

**Introduction:** 'A woman's 'breast' is an organ whose psychological functions are as important as its physical determinant of feminine attractiveness. Breast cancer is a disease that threatens an organ that is intimately associated with a woman's self-image, sexuality, as well as her reproductive and nurturing capacity. These threats have serious psychological implications for women living with breast cancer. All cancer patients experience some level of distress associated with cancer and during its treatment at all stages of the disease. The breast cancer patients engulfed with wide web of problems viz., Financial, Familial, Practical, Emotional and Physical etc.

**Materials and Methods:** - For the data collection scale by NCCN distress DIS-A 'distress thermometer' was used the study. The total number of cases was 500 and period was one month. Patient returned completed questionnaire, those who are admitted in the hospital. The Breast cancer patient's problems and Distress level was assessed by "NCCN" distress thermometer.

**Results:**As per marking on the distress thermometer, among the total patients 363 (72.6%) are suffering with 'Mild' level of distress followed by 127 (25.4%) with moderately severe level of distress and 10 (2.0%) with severe level of distress. The patients with moderate and severe level of distress will be subject for further evaluation to finalize the treatment options

**Discussions:**The word cancer continues to strike fear into the hardest souls. Now a days the increasing number of Breast cancer affected persons or living withcancer as a chronic disease, .creates more distress on the importance of paying attention in daily routine and personal life efforts .The disease has an impact on Breast cancer patients problems of family, practical, physical, emotional, and also it affects their lives. These are playing main role in strengthening the feelings of safely and security. The mutual communication from healthcare providers and patients helps to understand the breast cancer disease prognosis and also it prevents patient's negative emotions such as anxiety, distress, and fear.

**Conclusion:** Breast cancer is the main distress to the women who undergo mastectomy, multidisciplinary treatment of breast cancer is very important. Counseling plays a vital role by providing assurance, such as breast reconstructioncounseling for family, friends and financial aid to needy patients. Utilizing all resources from the social work department bring a notable change in their lives.

**Key Word:** Breast cancer patient's problems of family, practical, physical, emotional, and Distress level measurement.

**AIM:**The aim of the study is to assess and identify the problems of breast cancer patients and their distress levels by using NCCN Distress thermometer scale. The study includes practical, family, emotional, physical problems and psychological management.

**Introduction:** - A woman's 'breast' is an organ whose psychological functions are as important as its physical determinant of feminine attractiveness. Breast cancer is a disease that threatens an organ that is intimately associated with a woman's self image, sexuality, as well as her reproductive and nurturing capacity. These threats have serious psychological implications for women living with breast cancer. All cancer patients experience some level of distress associated with cancer and during its treatment at all stages of the disease. The treatment for breast cancer is hinged upon the surgical removal of an organ that is tied intimately to a woman's sense of femaleness, sexuality and mothering capacity. The breast cancer patients engulfed with wide web of problems viz., Financial, Familial, Practical, Emotional and Physical etc.

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### Inclusion criteria

- 1) Only breast cancer patients include for the study
- 2) Those who are willing to participate in the study

### Exclusion Criteria

Those who are not interested to participate in the study.

## Results

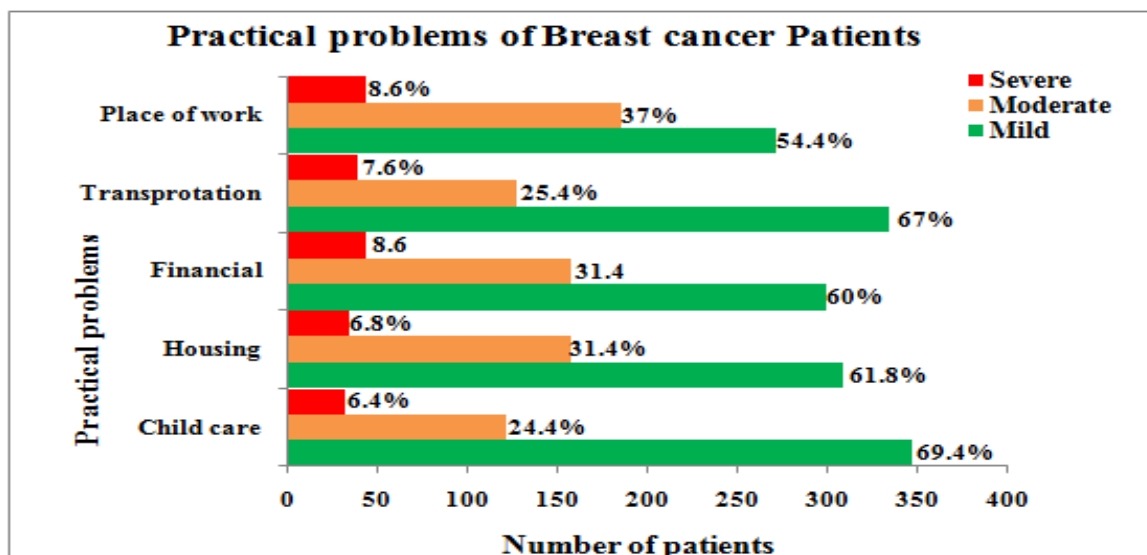
### 1. PRACTICAL PROBLEMS:-

The practical problems include the actual problems faced day by day by patients.

**Table 1.1 Practical Problems**

S.No	Practical Problems	Mild		Moderate		Severe		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Child Care	347	69.40	121	24.20	32	6.40	500	100.00
2	Housing	309	61.80	157	31.40	34	6.80	500	100.00
3	Financial	300	60.00	157	31.40	43	8.60	500	100.00
4	Transportation	335	67.00	127	25.40	38	7.60	500	100.00
5	Difficulty at Place of work	272	54.40	185	37.00	43	8.60	500	100.00

The severe practical problems mentioned by patients are a) Financial and b) difficulty at place of work (8.6%). Around 8% have reported 'transportation' to hospital from residence as severe practical problem, and the remaining 6.8% and 6.40% mentioned a) Child care and household factors as severe problems (Fig 6.1). Regarding moderate practical problems 31% each have mentioned a) House Hold issues and financial issues. 'Difficulty at place of work' was mentioned as moderate practical problem by majority (37%). More than 60% have reported 'mild' practical problems on all aspects mentioned in Table 1.2



**Fig 1.1 Practical Problems of Breast Cancer Patients**

**Index on cumulative level of practical problems:**

In order to understand over all practical problems on all issues mentioned in Table 1.1, an index was prepared. The scores were given to respondents based on level of problem as follows, a. 1. Mild Problems, 2. Moderately severe Problems, 3. Severe Problems. The total no. of aspects considered in table are '5'. The total score lie between 5 to 15. The patients were grouped into three categories based on score obtained as follows.

Level of problem	Score
1. Mild Problem	8 and less
2. Moderately severe problem	9 -11
3. Severe problem	12 +

**Table 1.2 Index on cumulative level of practical problems**

S.No	Level of practical Problem	No. of patients	Percentage (%)
1	Mild	325	65
2	Moderately severe	147	29.40
3	Severe	28	5.60
Total		500	100

The index table shows that 325 respondents (65 %) have reported of experienced with mild practical problems, 147 respondents (29.40 %) mentioned with experience of moderately severe practical problems and remaining 28 respondents (5.60 %) have reported of facing severe practical problems. It is concluded that 65 per cent of the respondents had mild practical problems. The severe practical problem was observed among 5.6% of patients, and the moderately severe practical problems were reported of experienced by 29% of patients.

**2. LEVEL OF FAMILY PROBLEMS**

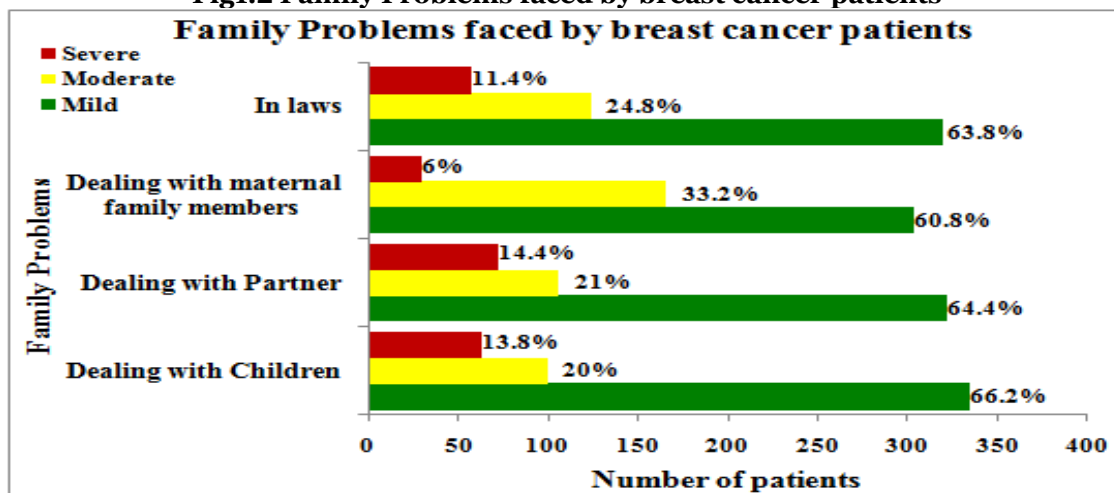
The information on the level of family problems of the respondents has been elicited and presented in the Table

**Table 1.3 Levels of Family Problems**

S.No	Family Problems	Mild		Moderate		Severe		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Dealing with children	268	66.20	166	33.2	69	13.80	500	100.00
2	Dealing with partner	304	60.8	124	24.20	72	14.40	500	100.00
3	Dealing with maternal family members	370	60.80	100	20.0	30	6.00	500	100.00
4	In laws	337	63.80	106	21.20	57	11.40	500	100.00

With regard to family level problems, more proportion have reported severity on a) Dealing with partner (14.4%) and b) dealing with of children (13.8%). 'Dealing with in laws' is the third most severe problems and mentioned by 11.4%. The remaining 6% reported of severe problem in dealing with maternal family members (Fig 1.2).

**Fig1.2 Family Problems faced by breast cancer patients**



### Index on cumulative family problem:

In order to assess overall cumulative burden of family problems, an index was developed based on the aspects dealt in table 1.3. The scores were allotted based on the level of problems as follows, '1' Mild problem, '2', moderately severe problems, '3' severe problems. The total score range lie between 4-12.

The respondents were divided in to three groups based on scores as follows.

Score	Level of problem
5-7	1.Mild Problem
8-9	2.Moderately severe problem
10 +	3.Severe problem

**Table 1.4 Index on cumulative level of Family Problems**

S.No	Cumulative level of family problems	No. of Respondents
1	Mild	311(62%)
2	Moderately severe	145 (29%)
3	Severe	44 (8%)
Total		500 (100.0%)

When overall family problems faced by patient was observed, majority have reported mild problem (62%) followed by 29% with moderately severe problems and the remaining 8.8% encountered with severe family problems.

### 3. LEVEL OF EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

'Emotional Problems' of Breast Cancer patients is of serious concern compared to physical and family problems. The Emotional Problems include aspects like 1.Depression, 2. Fears, 3.Nervousness, 4. Sadness, 5.Worry, 6.Loss of interest in day to day activities, and 7.Spiritual concerns.

The information on the level of Emotional Problems of the respondents has been elicited and presented in the Table.

**Table 1.5 Levels of Emotional Problems**

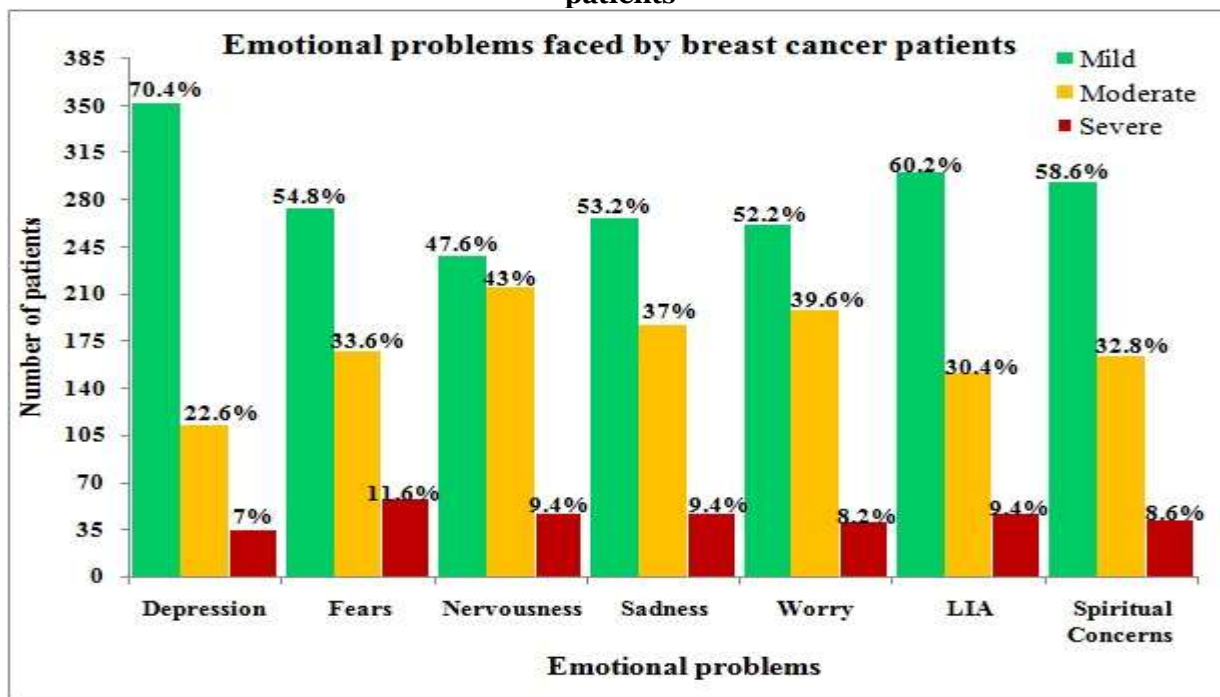
S.No	Emotional Problems	Mild		Moderate		Severe		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Depression	352	70.40	113	22.60	35	7.00	500	100.00
2	Fears	274	54.80	168	33.60	58	11.60	500	100.00
3	Nervousness	238	47.60	215	43.00	47	9.40	500	100.00
4	Sadness	266	53.20	187	37.40	47	9.40	500	100.00
5	Worry	261	52.20	198	39.60	41	8.20	500	100.00
6	Loss of interest in day to day activities	301	60.20	152	30.40	47	9.40	500	100.00
7	Spiritual concerns	293	58.60	164	32.80	43	8.60	500	100.00

The analysis of 'Emotional Problems' faced by breast cancer patients shows (Fig 1.3) that severity was reported by majority as 'Fears' on related issues (11%) followed by b) Nervousness , c) Sadness, d) Loss of interest in day to day activities by 9.4% each. The next severe emotional problems mentioned are on a) Spiritual concerns (8.6%) and depression (7%).

While moderate emotional problems was analyzed, majority have reported 'nervousness' (43%), followed by 'worry' 39% and 'sadness' (37%). The other moderate emotional problems mentioned were a) 'Fears' (33%), b) Spiritual concern (32%), c) Loss of interest day to day activities (30%) and depression (22%).

'Depression' was the mild emotional problems reported by majority of patients (70%), followed by 'loss in day to day activities (60%), c) Spiritual concerns (58%), d) Fears (54%), e) 'Worry' (53%), f) worry (52%), and nervousness (47.6%).

**Fig 1.3 Emotional Problems faced by breast cancer patients**



**Index on cumulative emotional problems:-**

For assessing the overall cumulative nature of emotional problems an index was developed based on response of patients on the aspects mentioned in Table above. The total no. of aspects considered is '7'. The score was allotted based on response to problems as follows a. '1' mild, b. 2. Moderately Severe problems and c. '3' severe problems the total score of index lie between 7 to 21. The patients were classified in to three groups based on rank as follows.

Score	Level of emotional problems
7-10	Mild
11-14	Moderately severe
15+	Severe

**Table 1.6 Index on cumulative overall level of emotional problem:-**

S.No	Level of emotional problems	No. of Respondents
1	Mild	307(61.4%)
2	Moderately severe	181 (36.2%)
3	Severe	12 (2.4%)
Total		500 (100.0%)

As per index (Table 1.6), the severe emotional problem was observed only among 2.4% of respondents while 'moderately severe problems' was noticed among 36.2%, and the mild problem was noticed among the remaining 61% of patients. Thus, severe emotional problem was mentioned by only a few patients.

**4. PHYSICAL PROBLEMS**

There was big range of physical problems faced by breast cancer patients which include viz., 1. Change in Appearance 2. Bathing or dressing 3. Breathing 4. Changes in urination 5. Constipation 6. Diarrhea 7. Eating 8. Fatigue 9. Feeling swollen 10. Fevers, 11. Getting around 12. Indigestion 13. Memory concentration, 14. Mouth sore, 15. Nausea 16. Nasal congested, 17. Pain 18. Sexual 19. Dry skin or itching, 20. Sleep and 21. Tingling in hands or feet.

**Table 1.7 Levels of Physical Problems**

S.No	Physical Problems	Mild		Moderate		Severe		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Appearance	308	61.60	138	27.60	54	10.80	500	100.00
2	Bathing or dressing	340	68.00	118	23.60	42	8.40	500	100.00

3	Breathing	317	63.40	150	30.00	33	6.60	500	100.00
4	Changes in urination	311	62.20	145	29.00	44	8.80	500	100.00
5	Constipation	317	63.40	140	28.00	43	8.60	500	100.00
6	Diarrhea	292	58.40	173	34.60	35	7.00	500	100.00
7	Eating	286	57.20	190	38.00	24	4.80	500	100.00
8	Fatigue	228	45.60	207	41.40	65	13.00	500	100.00
9	Feeling swollen	251	50.20	202	40.40	47	9.40	500	100.00
10	Fevers	286	57.20	166	33.20	48	9.60	500	100.00
11	Getting around	295	59.00	126	25.20	79	15.80	500	100.00
12	Indigestion	265	53.00	195	39.00	40	8.00	500	100.00
13	Memory concentration	274	54.80	186	37.20	40	8.00	500	100.00
14	Mouth sore	271	54.20	195	39.00	34	6.80	500	100.00
15	Nausea	292	58.40	123	24.60	85	17.00	500	100.00
16	Nasal congested	306	61.20	159	31.80	35	7.00	500	100.00
17	Pain	288	57.60	165	33.00	47	9.40	500	100.00
18	Sexual	304	60.80	104	20.80	92	18.40	500	100.00
19	Dry skin or itching	249	49.80	194	38.80	57	11.40	500	100.00
20	Sleep	244	48.80	224	44.80	32	6.40	500	100.00
21	Tingling in hands or feet	300	60.00	144	28.80	56	11.20	500	100.00

The table shows that majority of the respondents had mild problems on bathing/dressing (68%), breathing (63.40 %), Constipation (63.40 %), changes in urination (62.20 %) and nasal congested problems (61.20 %). More proportion of respondents reported severe problems in physical aspects viz a) Sexuality (18.4%) followed by b) Nausea (17%) c) Getting around (15.8%) d) Fatigue (13%) and e) dryness of skin & itching (11.4%) f) tingling in hands/feet (11.2%) and g) change in appearance (10.8%). The other physical problems reported are h)Feeling swollen (9.4%), i) Fever (9.6%), j) Pain (9.4%), k) difficulty in bathing & addressing (8.4%), l) Constipation and Memory loss (8.0%), m)Congested nasal (7%) n) Mouth sore and sleeplessness (6.8%). Majority of respondents reported moderate problems on sleep (44.8%) b) Fatigue and feeling swollen (41&40%) c) Mouth sores (39%) d) dry skin and itching (3.8%). And around 30% of respondents expressed moderate problems in all other items mentioned in table.

Among all respondents, majority has (nearly half) have reported mild problems in physical aspects.

#### Index on cumulative physical problems:

In order to assess the overall cumulative suffering of physical problems by patients an index was developed based on response to the aspects mentioned (Table 1.8).

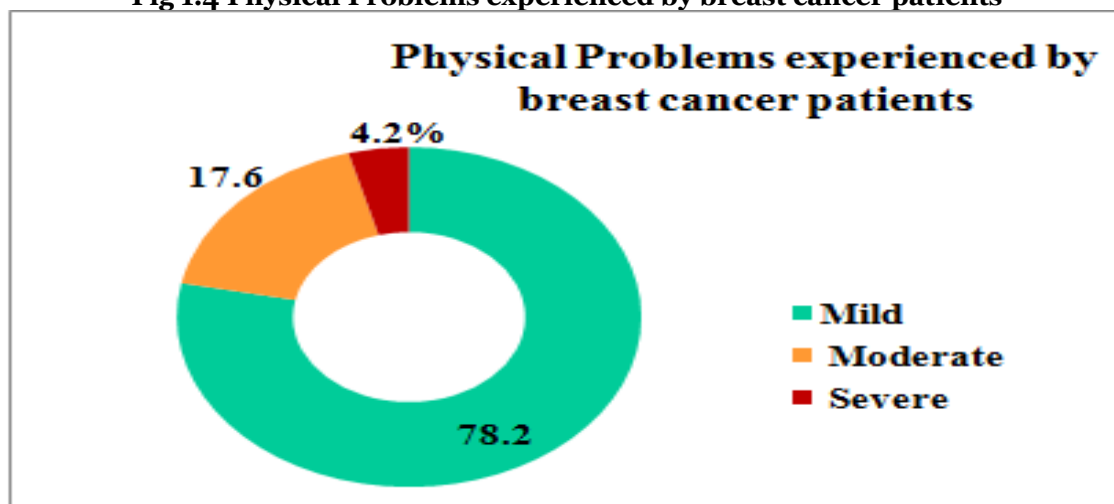
The total no. of physical aspects considered for index is '21'. The score of '1' is given to mild problem, '2' to moderately severe and '3' to severe problems. Thus, the total score of index lie between 21 to 63. The patients were grouped to three categories based on cumulative suffering of physical problems as follows.

Score	Cumulative Level of Physical problems
21-36	Mild
37-50	Moderately severe
51+	Severe

**Table 1.8 Index on cumulative physical problems**

S.No	Physical problems	No. of patients	Percentage (%)
1	Mild	391	78.20
2	Moderately severe	88	17.60
3	severe	21	4.20
Total		500	100

**Fig 1.4 Physical Problems experienced by breast cancer patients**



The Social Worker/Doctor explains the symptoms of distress to the patients and ask them to quantify the level of distress on the scale of thermometer starting from 0-10 through marking. The patients will be categorized in to three groups based on the marking on the scale as follows.

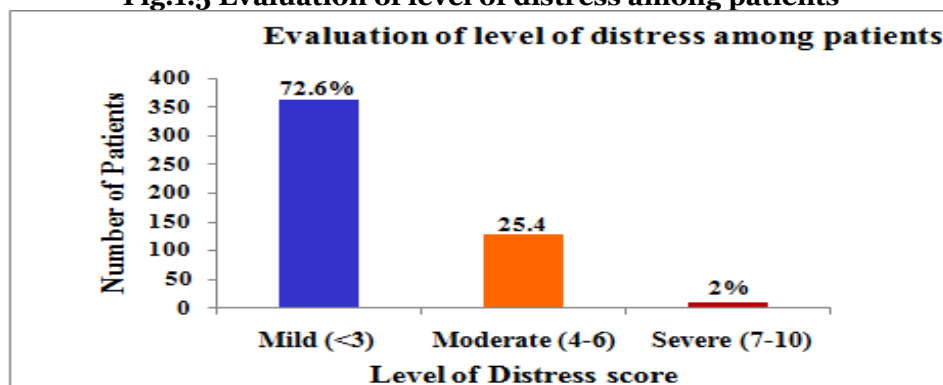
Rank	Level of Distress
< 3	Mild
4-6	Moderately severe
7-10	Severe

**Distress level among patients:-**

**Table 1.9 Evaluation of level of distress among patients**

S.No	Distress Score	No. of Patients (Percent)	Evaluation of distress
1	< - 3	363 (72.6%)	Mild
2	4-6	127 (25.4%)	Moderately severe
3	7-10	10 (2.0%)	Severe
Total 500 (100%)			

**Fig.1.5 Evaluation of level of distress among patients**



As per marking on the distress thermometer, among the total patients 363 (72.6%) are suffering with 'Mild' level of distress followed by 127 (25.4%) with moderately severe level of distress and 10 (2.0%) with severe level of distress (Table 1.9 and Fig 1.5). The patients with moderate and severe level of distress will be subject for further evaluation to finalize the treatment options.

**Discussion:** The word cancer continues to strike fear into the hardest souls. Now a days the increasing number of Breast cancer affected persons or living with cancer as a chronic disease, .creates more distress on the importance of paying attention in daily routine and personal life efforts .The disease has an impact on Breast cancer patients problems of family, practical, physical, emotional, and also it affects their lives. Most of the breast cancer patients seek help from healthcare providers and caregivers. These are playing main role in strengthening the feelings of safely and security. The mutual communication from healthcare providers and

patients helps to understand the breast cancer disease prognosis and also it prevents patient’s negative emotions such as anxiety, distress, and fear.

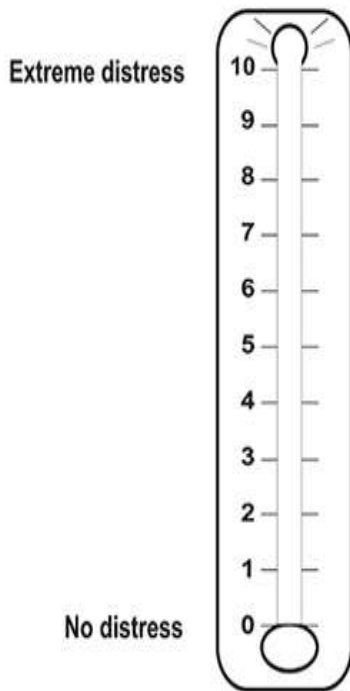
**Conclusion:**Breast cancer is the main distress to the women who undergo mastectomy, multidisciplinary treatment of breast cancer is very important. Counseling plays a vital role by providing assurance, such as breast reconstruction counseling for family, friends and financial aid to needy patients. Utilizing all resources from the social work department bring a notable change in their lives.

**References:**

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2. Andersen, Barbara L., et al. "Distress reduction from a psychological intervention contributes to improved health for cancer patients." *Brain, behavior, and immunity* **21.7** (2007): 953-961.

**SCREENING TOOLS FOR MEASURING DISTRESS**

Instructions: First please circle the number (0-10) that best describes how much distress you have been experiencing in the past week including today.



Second, please indicate if any of the following has been a problem for you in the past week including today. Be sure to check YES or NO for each.

- | YES                      | NO                       | <u>Practical Problems</u>            | YES                      | NO                       | <u>Physical Problems</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Child care                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Appearance               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Housing                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bathing/dressing         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Insurance/financial                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Breathing                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Transportation                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Changes in urination     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Work/school                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Constipation             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Treatment decisions                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Diarrhea                 |
|                          |                          |                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Eating                   |
|                          |                          |                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fatigue                  |
|                          |                          | <u>Family Problems</u>               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Feeling Swollen          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Dealing with children                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fevers                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Dealing with partner                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Getting around           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Ability to have children             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Indigestion              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family health issues                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Memory/concentration     |
|                          |                          |                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mouth sores              |
|                          |                          | <u>Emotional Problems</u>            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nausea                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Depression                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nose dry/congested       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fears                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pain                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nervousness                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sexual                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sadness                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Skin dry/itchy           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Worry                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sleep                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of interest in usual activities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Substance abuse          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>Spiritual/religious concerns</u>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tingling in hands/feet   |

Other Problems: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_