Abstract background
Living through a diagnosis of breast cancer can be extraordinarily traumatic. The response is heightened for the younger woman as she seeks to understand why this has happened to her at this early stage of life. While breast cancer is often associated with older women, 25% of new breast cancer diagnoses in Australia in the year 2000 were in young women. An interpretive study drawing on feminist epistemology using in-depth interviews provides valuable insight into the lived experience of six young Queensland women living with breast cancer, and their families. This paper presents insight into the experience and subjectivity of breast cancer with a particular focus on young women and what it means for them to have the condition at a younger age and the impact it has on their ordinary social situation. The qualitative data supports previous research identifying a diagnosis of breast cancer for younger women is likely to cause greater emotional distress than for older women and that concerns in relation to motherhood, family and fertility are particularly important. In addition the study showed that a specialist breast care nurse is an important resource for young women at the time of diagnosis and that family centered care should be at the core of health professionals’ business. In many respects younger women face a tougher reality having greater responsibility for the well being of others in their family and in the provision of stability for everyday family life.

Method
- Interpretative and set out to identify and describe experience through the telling of women’s stories (Emden, 1998). This was seen as a valuable means to achieving a deeper and richer appreciation of the emotional complexities surrounding what it means to have breast cancer as a young woman and its impact on social life (Porter, 1998).
- Six women aged between 28-45 years with a diagnosis of breast cancer in the previous 12 months completed the interviews.
- Purposive sample
- The method of data collection was in-depth interviews.
  - Women encouraged to tell their story openly without constraints of questions.
  - Interviews in women’s home with good rapport established

Discussion
The qualitative data from the interviews supports previous research identifying that a diagnosis of breast cancer for the younger woman is likely to cause greater emotional distress especially in relation to motherhood, family and fertility (Sammarco, 2001; Turner et al., 2005). The women spoke of the compounding effects of the treatment for breast cancer on their lives and their family and how this impacted on their recovery. However the positive and resilient nature of young women when faced with adversity was highlighted from this research. The women viewed this experience in a very determined nature they want to survive to see their children grow up and refused to let the breast cancer beat them.

Heading
My choices for my life; taken away
It really made me look at how society views breasts and femininity, and in one fell swoop I was told that everything that was feminine to me was gone, I was losing my breast, I possibly couldn’t have children – they were big things and we’re bred in society that women are meant to have children. It’s all right if you choose not to have them, but to be told you can’t have them, it’s another control thing, it’s a choice, and all of a sudden, my choices for my life that I had planned were being taken away from me. Dawn

Staying positive with the help of friends
Funny and tragic at the same time. One young girl who was in her 20s, she had lost her fertility; she was saying you get to go through menopause at the same time as your mother.
Really funny but tragic as well So no I don’t think I would have got through without them.

Pat

Hold it together for the family
I found that you just get over one thing and there would be something else you have to deal with. And having to climb back up there again and I really felt that I just had to be so strong and hold it together for my family. While I was okay then they would be okay.

Anne

Significance of research
This study explored the experience of a diagnosis of breast cancer for women under the age of fifty. In particular the researcher wanted to highlight the psychosocial support needs of younger women in relation to their phase of life and family concerns. The significance of this study was to highlight areas the younger women themselves saw as important in relation to having the disease.

Implications
- Recognition of the importance of her family for the younger woman.
- Individual needs assessed in relation to the woman’s phase of life.
- Inclusion and support of the young woman’s support network (partner and children).
- Recognition of the multiple roles of young women at this time of their lives.

Conclusions
This research has provided a valuable insight into the experience of breast cancer for young women and their individual emotional concerns. The results can serve to sensitise and influence health professionals in relation to the care of younger women with a breast cancer diagnosis.

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Reference: