Breast cancer in young women: Psychosocial challenges.

While breast cancer is often associated with older women, in the year 2000 25% of new breast cancer diagnoses in Australia were in women aged between 20-49 years. This identifies that age group as a significant cohort whose experiences and needs warrant close attention. There is great deal of literature exploring the psychosocial impact breast cancer has on a woman’s life, including the emotional and physical effects experienced by breast cancer survivors, yet little of this relates to younger women. This paper reports the findings of a interpretive research project that explored the experiences and support needs of younger women with breast cancer, highlighting unique concerns for this age group. The Queensland women who participated in this study identified issues that do not traditionally relate to older women such as fertility, early clinically induced menopause, young family and sexuality. These women reported that they were engaged in multiple life roles, such as building and managing their careers, maintaining a close intimate relationship with their partners and raising their children. The combination of these challenges with the stress of breast cancer created difficulties for these women, yet the women reported that they felt unsupported by health professionals who appeared to be focused on older women, and whose interventions were not always relevant to their needs. Further research is required to improve the understanding of the psychosocial impact of breast cancer diagnosis on the younger women.