

On Women's Health and Rights  
Lectures, Speeches and Statements  
Mahmoud F. Fathalla

**Women key to family and community health**  
Acceptance speech  
WHO Family Health Ihsan Dogramaci Foundation Prize  
Fifty-fourth World Health Assembly  
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I accept with gratitude and with humility this prestigious prize. I take it as another indication of the importance which our World Health Organization continues to attach to family health, as a foundation for global health. It is an honour to accept a prize carrying the name of Dr Ihsan Dogramaci, a giant of our time, a man greatly admired for all what he has done and what he is doing for the health of children and families of the world. I wish him well and I wish him the best family health.

It is customary in these occasions that we acknowledge those who helped us, and guided our steps. My list happens to be too long to mention. But I cannot miss to mention one. I owe a lot to women. I listened to women, I heard women and I learned from women. I had the honour to serve in a community where people are mostly poor, and where women are the poorest of the poor. I was always impressed by the ability of these poor women to cope when life did not treat them fairly or well. Given a choice and given the means to implement their choice, they make sound decisions, for the health of their families and for their communities. When I was privileged to work for many years in the international field, I had the opportunity to see family health problems in an international context. I came to realize that subordination of women is more pervasive than is generally realized and that powerlessness of women can be a serious family health hazard, almost everywhere. I arrived to a conviction, which I would like to share with this distinguished forum, a conviction that women hold the key to family health, and to the health of their communities. As I approach the end of a long career, my prescription for family health is power for women, and the bigger the dose given, the better will be the result.