Violence against women’s health in international law
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The book explores the relationship between violence against women on one hand, and the rights to health and reproductive health on the other. It argues that violation of the right to health is a consequence of violence, and that (state) health policies might be a cause of – or create the conditions for – violence against women. It significantly contributes to feminist and international human rights legal scholarship by conceptualising a new ground-breaking idea, violence against women's health (VAWH), using the Hippocratic paradigm as the backbone of the analysis. The two dimensions of violence at the core of the book – the horizontal, ‘interpersonal’ dimension and the vertical ‘state policies’ dimension – are investigated through around 70 decisions of domestic, regional and international judicial or quasi-judicial bodies (the anamnesis). The concept of VAWH, drawn from the anamnesis, enriches the traditional concept of violence against women with a human rights-based approach to autonomy and a reflection on the pervasiveness of patterns of discrimination (diagnosis). VAWH as theorised in the book allows the reconceptualisation of states’ obligations in an innovative way, by identifying for both dimensions obligations of result, due diligence obligations, and obligations to progressively take steps (treatment). The book eventually asks whether it is not international law itself that is the ultimate cause of VAWH (prognosis).
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Key facts. Violence against women – particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – is a major public health problem and a violation of women’s human rights. Global estimates published by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Violence can negatively affect women’s physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health, and may increase the risk of acquiring HIV in some settings.

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