

Russia decriminalized DV and What happened next is wrenching

Yulia Bragina and Sophia Jones, USA Today, USATODAY.com

Yana Savchuk could have been saved. But when the Russian hairdresser, 36, called police in November saying that her partner was going to kill her, the officers who arrived cast off her cries for help as ridiculous.

“If you get killed, we will definitely come to examine the body,” one police officer said, as recorded on the victim’s phone, before leaving without offering protection. “Do not worry.” Forty minutes later, Savchuk was dead, beaten by the same man police refused to arrest.

It was a domestic violence case that shocked Russia in 2016, triggering debate on the role of police in addressing an epidemic that kills at least 12,000 women every year, according to Human Rights Watch. To understand how endemic Russia’s domestic violence problem is, consider it’s about 30 times worse than in neighboring Turkey, which has half the population. It’s about 37 times worse than the U.S. which has twice the population of Russia.

Official Russian Interior Ministry statistics point to 4 million reported cases of domestic abuse in 2015. That statistic does not include the likely high number of unreported cases, many women in Russia, and around the world, do not report domestic abuse because of feelings of shame or fear of retribution.

Others, like Savchuk, lose their lives despite reaching out for help due to a police mentality that largely underplays gender-based violence and a police force relatively poorly trained and often legally unable to properly assist victims of violence.

“When I respond to domestic violence, I often feel useless because I can’t arrest the abuser without the victim’s written complaint,” said Vladimir, a policeman in a roughly 300-person village just outside of Moscow. “We don’t have a procedure of compulsory arrest.” Vladimir would only speak on the condition that he not be identified by his real name.

In Vladimir’s village, dilapidated wooden houses sit not far from the mansions of those who commute into Moscow. Income doesn’t seem to matter, Vladimir responds to domestic violence calls at both types of properties every weekend. Usually alcohol is involved.

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In the U.S. starting in the 1990s, lawmakers and police officers combined forces to reduce domestic violence, with stunning results: domestic violence in the U.S. has dropped more than 60% in the last 20 years. Training police officers and judges to act on calls, and toughening punishments, are credited in part for the decrease.

But Russia is heading in the other direction: On February 7, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a controversial law that decriminalized domestic abuse for first-time offenders who do not inflict bodily harm requiring hospital treatment. Prior to Putin signing the bill, abusers faced up to two years in prison. Now, if found guilty in court, abusers could face a fine of between \$85 and \$500, 15 days in jail or compulsory work.

Yevgeny Roizman, the mayor of Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, said the impact of the bill was felt immediately. Two days after Putin signed the bill, he announced on Facebook that the number of calls to police in Yekaterinburg regarding domestic violence rose from about 120-130 per day before the bill to 300-350 per day after.

Members of the Russian parliament voted almost unanimously in favor of the bill, with parliament speaker Vyacheslav Volodin, a key advisor to Putin, saying the bill was "necessary to do everything in order to preserve the family."

The Russian Orthodox Church asserted its wide-reaching influence by staunchly backing the bill. Religious leaders have long advocated for less interference in family affairs.

"We think that the term 'domestic violence' is connected to ideas of radical feminism where a man is often portrayed as a potential aggressor," said the church's commission on family affairs in a 2015 statement. "This contradicts multiple research results that say that a family based on marriage is the safest environment for women and children."

Activists and human rights organizations warn the bill will only exacerbate the problem. They have for years demanded a coherent law on domestic violence. Before the decriminalization bill was passed, victims had to sue their abusers. That meant that they had to gather all the documents, evidence, medical assessments and pay lawyers on their own dime.

According to the new bill, cases of battery may no longer be prosecuted privately; instead, it's now the police and public prosecutor's responsibility to prove in court that the victim was indeed abused. But what happens when police don't believe a punch to the face is domestic violence?

Alexander, 26, a police officer who also insisted on being identified by a pseudonym in order to speak, lives in Belgorod, near the Russia-Ukraine border. He said he has constantly responded to distress calls over the last two years.

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In some cases, he said, police officers fine the woman who called for help the equivalent of \$40 if officers interpret claims as slander. The man, often an intimate partner, who she accuses of threatening her, is let off the hook. Alexander doesn't expect the new law will make much of a difference in the lives of at-risk women. Research shows that increased numbers of female police officers lead to lower rates of domestic violence and murders.

In Russia, women make up 20% of the police force, according to statistics on total police and women officers provided by Deputy Interior Minister Igor Zubov. PRI could not independently verify this number and there are no reliable public statistics to back up this claim. That's a relatively high number, especially compared to the U.S., where women make up fewer than 13% of law enforcement. However, most Russian women officers are tasked with administrative and low-level education duties. They largely do not play leading roles in police stations or have the ability to hire fire or enact policies dealing with issues of domestic violence and femicide.

Roman Habarov, 45, a former police officer in the central Russian city of Voronezh, said the trouble is that officers don't have the tools to respond to domestic violence calls. Most times, women who called to report violence then wouldn't write an official complaint. This situation would repeat, he said, until one day they would arrive too late and the woman would be found thrown out of a window, strangled, beaten or stabbed to death.

"For the last 20 years, Russian legislators have done absolutely nothing to solve the problem of domestic violence," said Habarov. "Our society needs to develop. Police and legislators won't be able to do anything if the woman thinks that her husband has the right to beat her."

Even when victims would start the legal process to hold their abusive partners accountable, Habarov said he can't remember a single case where the abuser was actually sent to prison for battery.

"We either have to release [accused abusers] straight away, or break the law ourselves and take them in," he explained. "Sometimes it is common sense to just arrest them and allow the children to sleep and go to school in the morning, and the wife would remain unharmed. The next day he would sober up and say sorry to his wife, and she would accept the apology."

Habarov said it is routine for police officers not to respond to the first call for help. The retired policeman said he's haunted by his time on the force. There were so many times, he said, that his colleagues shrugged off calls for help. Instead, they placed blame on the victims for "nagging their husband into beating them."

New York Looks to Teens in Effort to Prevent Domestic Violence

An estimated 1 in 3 adolescents have experienced abuse, but few are educated about it.

By Melissa Jeltsen, of The Huffingtonpost, www.huffingtonpost.com

NEW YORK — A task force assembled by Mayor Bill de Blasio to tackle New York City's stubborn domestic violence problem plans to ramp up its teenage outreach efforts, hoping to stop violence before it even starts.

While most violent crime has dropped over the past decade in New York City, domestic violence hasn't budged, frustrating public safety officials and victim advocates. The task force, created in 2016, has been charged with developing a road map for reducing domestic violence across the city. It recently finished its initial fact-gathering phase, with the focus on teens as one of the major takeaways.

Prevention efforts must include educating young people about healthy relationships, said Bea Hanson, who ran the Justice Department's Office on Violence Against Women before being brought on as executive director of the task force. She said there is currently no standardized curriculum on teen dating abuse for students in New York City.

Nationally, approximately 1 in 3 teens will experience some form of abuse by a romantic partner, with 1 in 10 experiencing physical abuse. That dovetails with a 2013 study of NYC public high school students, which found that 10 percent of those who date have reported being intentionally hit, slammed into something or injured with an object or weapon by the person they dated.

That's worrisome for many reasons, Hanson said. Not only can dating abuse have long-term physical and psychological effects, it can also interfere with a teen's academic success.

"Witnessing violence at home or experiencing violence in your own relationship has a big impact on your ability to participate in school," she said.

The task force is evaluating educational programs used across the country to learn which might be a good model for New York City, which has the largest school district in the nation, she said.

Experts say unhealthy relationship patterns often begin in youth and continue into adulthood. Victims of teen dating violence are more likely to experience depression and substance abuse, and report higher rates of suicide attempts.

"When you ask adult survivors of domestic violence when they experienced their first abusive relationship, the majority will tell you it was during adolescence," said Elizabeth Miller, chief of adolescent and young adult medicine at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. "That really speaks to the importance of prevention work in those middle and high school years."

While the term "teen dating violence" has been around for at least 15 years, the phenomenon is still surprisingly under-recognized by teens and parents alike, she said.

New York Looks to Teens in Effort to Prevent Domestic Violence, cont.

Teens, who may be involved in their first relationship, may not be able to determine if a partner's behaviors are normal because they lack a basis for comparison. And parents may simply miss what is happening, especially if a large portion of dating abuse occurs over technology.

Digital abuse can include texting a person constantly to check who they are with, coercing a partner to share naked photos, and "revenge porn," where a person's intimate photos are distributed without their consent.

In 2007, the National Domestic Violence Hotline launched Loveisrespect, a website that offers support and resources for young people affected by dating abuse. Last year, the project received 113,651 calls, chats and texts. Fifteen percent of the interactions were from victims or their concerned friends and family members reporting digital abuse.

"It's really complicated for parents to monitor what is going on," Miller said. "We encourage parents to talk to their kids and talk often, and ask and ask often."

At 17, Sarina Gupta, a senior at New York's Hunter College High School, is the youngest member of the mayor's task force. She is also on the National Youth Advisory Board for Loveisrespect, where she helped to create a national lesson plan for schools to educate students on dating violence prevention.

Now, she is offering her insight to the task force as they brainstorm how best to connect with students.

"Most teens literally don't know that dating abuse exists," she said. "It's not discussed."

That might be partially a result of word choice. More teens are hooking up than dating per se, Gupta said, and so many teens might mistakenly assume dating abuse isn't something that could happen to them.

"It's complicated because there aren't as many 'official' relationships," she said. "But if you are engaging in a sexual relationship or an emotional relationship and unhealthy behaviors are going on, it's important to recognize it."

She urged parents and friends to withhold judgment if a teen tells them about abuse.

"You should encourage your children to feel comfortable coming to you about a relationship, and if they do come forward, be understanding and don't blame them," she said. "Sometimes, the best thing you can do is just listen. At the end of the day, your main goal is to be there for that person."

The task force plans to release a comprehensive blueprint on reducing domestic violence in the spring.

Mississippi Lawmaker Reconsiders Domestic Violence as Grounds for Divorce

The GOP lawmaker came under fire for killing a bill that would have made it easier for abuse victims to divorce.
By **Melissa Jeltsen**, The Huffington Post, www.huffingtonpost.com

After facing backlash for killing a bill that would have added domestic violence to the list of legal reasons a person can get a divorce in Mississippi, state Rep. Andy Gipson (R-Braxton) has backtracked.

The Mississippi lawmaker introduced an amendment on Monday that would allow physical, emotional, verbal, sexual and financial abuse as grounds for divorce.

Gipson had earlier argued that victims of domestic violence were already covered under the existing grounds.

There are currently 12 grounds for divorce in the state, including adultery, drunkenness and impotence. Victims of domestic violence can petition for divorce on grounds of “habitual cruel and inhuman treatment”, but experts say it is difficult for victims to prove the abuse was “habitual,” and someone else has to corroborate their claims.

The amended bill clarifies that only one instance of abuse is needed, and that the victim can testify as the sole witness.

“I am very pleased that the Mississippi House of Representatives has adopted a set of clear evidentiary guidelines on the important issue of domestic abuse divorce,” Gipson said in a statement.

“These guidelines will provide real and immediate help to domestic violence victims, as well as assistance to judges statewide as they consider domestic abuse divorce cases.”

He said he worked with the Mississippi Center for Violence Prevention to draft the solution. The amended bill passed the House on Monday and now heads to the Senate.

In a blog post, divorce lawyer Matthew Thompson, an adjunct professor of family law at Mississippi College School of Law in Jackson, praised the amendment for addressing one of the biggest obstacles facing domestic violence victims when obtaining a divorce: the corroboration requirement.

“Prior to this bill, the complaining party had to have a witness or such other corroboration of physical abuse, in addition to their own testimony,” he wrote.

“The problem with that is that in domestic violence situations it is routinely behind closed doors, in secret and it is all too common for the abused to not tell anyone.”

HAPPENINGS

ANGER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Wednesdays, 6-7:30pm. Co-ed six week group, start date contingent upon sign-ups.
\$40 fee for non-native clients.
Contact Tom @ 532-6811, ex 270

POSITIVE PARENTING & POSITIVE PARENTING OF TEENS

is done on an individual basis as space and time allow.
\$30 fee for non-native clients. For info or sign up,
Contact Mark @ 532-6811 ex 249.

FOCIS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

Women's Support Group Tuesdays 3 p.m. to 5p.m.
For info, contact Brittany@ FOCIS
PROGRAM, 532-6811 ex 270.

BRAVE AT HEART CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

For anyone who has been touched by Cancer
Meetings every 2nd Thursday
5:00 to 6:00 pm
Call Ashley, 532-6811 ex.272

GIRLS TAKE CHARGE GROUP

Every other Wednesday, 4:30 to 5:30
Teen Girls are invited
Call Ashley @ 532-6811 ex 272

BOYS TAKE CHARGE GROUP

Thursday afternoons, 3:30 to 4:30
Teen young men are invited
For info or sign-up call
Ashley, 532-6811 ex 272

THURSDAY SUPPORT GROUP

Explore both Modern & Traditional forms of beadwork
and other Traditional crafts. Thursday afternoons
from 3:00pm to 5:00pm in the South Conference room,
Call Mark @ 532-6811 ex. 249. For info or sign up.

MOTHERS STRONG GROUP

New Moms Supporting New Moms
Through Baby's Challenging First Year!
Contact Brittany to sign up
(530) 532-6181

HISTORY KEEPERS

Elders group, 55 and older
Tuesdays 12:30pm to 1:15pm
For more information or to attend,
Call Ashley @ 532-6811 ex. 270

RED ROAD TO WELLBRIETY MEETING

For those that have suffered alcoholism and
drug addiction and other forms of
self-defeating behaviors, you can walk the 12
steps of the Red Road to recovery.
WEEKLY MEETINGS ON WEDNESDAY @ 6.00 PM
@ FEATHER RIVER TRIBAL HEALTH
530-534-5394
EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

LOCAL DV SERVICES

FOCIS PROGRAM SERVICES

Advocacy Services, Restraining Order assistance, court accompaniment,
Community education and in-service training, Crisis intervention services,
Women's Talking Circles, Resource information & referral service.
Feather River Tribal Health 530-534-5394 ext. 270

Catalyst DV Services

24-hour hotline for DV intervention & referrals, Emergency Shelter, Children's
Program at HAVEN, Transitional Housing & Household establishment
Drop-in centers, Individual counseling, Support groups, Restraining Order
assistance & Court Accompaniment, Community Outreach.
24-Hour Hotline 800-895-8476 Oroville Drop-in Center 530-532-6427

SHARP (Self Help and Referral Program)

Self Help center that provides general assistance to people who do not have
attorneys. Assistance is provided in the areas of family law, guardianships,
evictions, small claims, name changes, and restraining orders.
1675 Montgomery Street Oroville, 530-532-7015



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