

Table of Contents

- [*Russian city sees domestic violence incidents double after Putin decriminalises beatings*](#)
 - [*Decriminalizing domestic violence in Russia*](#)
 - [*Russian women denied protest against bill decriminalising domestic violence vow to keep fighting*](#)
 - [*Russian bill decriminalizing domestic battery sails through first reading*](#)
 - [*Female circumcision as senseless cruelty*](#)
 - [*Mufti of the North Caucasus for circumcision of all Russian women*](#)
-

Russian city sees domestic violence incidents double after Putin decriminalises beatings

Between 12,000-14,000 Russian women are killed every year because of domestic abuse.

By Fiona Keating

International Business Times (11.02.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2lgoaZV> - Reports of domestic violence have increased by 133% in Yekaterinburg – the fourth largest city in Russia – after President Putin approved a law that reduces punishments for spousal or child abuse to a misdemeanour.

Police in Yekaterinburg responded to 350 incidents about domestic assaults every day, compared with 150 before the change in the legislation.

"Before, people were afraid of criminal charges – this acted as some kind of safety barrier," Yevgeny Roizman, the mayor of Yekaterinburg told Russian media, according to the Times. "People got the impression that before it wasn't allowed, but now it is."

Between 12,000-14,000 Russian women are killed every year because of domestic abuse, stated Rossiskaya Gazeta, the Russian government's official newspaper.

"The reporting is very low. It is a very concealed issue," says Marina Pisklakova, head of ANNA, a Moscow-based charity which has been fighting for improved support for victims of domestic violence. "But things are changing; there is not as much denial as there was."

According to Russian state statistics agency, there were 49,579 crimes in 2015 involving violence in the family, with 35,899 involving violence against a woman.

Under the new law, assaults that are categorised as "minor harm" such as "small abrasions, bruises, superficial wounds, and soft-tissue damage" are now a misdemeanour. They are punishable by 15 days in prison or a \$500 fine, according to the Moscow Times. Previously, punishment for domestic abuse carried a maximum sentence of two years in jail.

In the State Duma, the bill was passed virtually unanimously, with 380 deputies voting for the legislation, with only three voting against. Yelena Mizulina, the ultra-conservative MP who introduced the bill, called the previous punishments for domestic violence "absurd".

Amnesty International responded to the change in the law saying: "Russia is far behind global developments to protect victims of domestic violence, having very scarce measures in place, such as government-funded shelters, effective practices of protection orders or police officers trained in how to respond to reports about abuse and protect victims.

"Russian authorities must scrap this abusive legislation and put together a comprehensive package of measures to address the vast scale of domestic violence in Russia once and for all."

The UN's Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women Committee (CEDAW) has previously condemned Russia for its failure to take actions in addressing the issue of domestic violence.

Further reading:

[EU criticizes russia decriminalizing some forms of domestic violence](#)

[Russian newspaper tells domestic violence victims they should be 'proud of their bruises'](#)

Decriminalizing domestic violence in Russia

The Russian parliament has passed a controversial law that decriminalizes some forms of domestic violence. First-time offenders need no longer fear criminal prosecution.

By Yulia Vishnevetskaya and Roman Goncharenko

DW (27.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2kpTXHh> - A man who beats his wife, but manages to leave only bruises or abrasions, will no longer be guilty of a crime in Russia, rather simply an administrative offense. On Friday, Russia's lower house of parliament, the Duma, passed a controversial bill known as the "slapping law." If the upper house and President Vladimir Putin agree, then mild cases of domestic violence will be met with mild consequences.

Among those who crafted the bill is Yelena Mizulina, a member of parliament for the Just Russia party who is known for her strong conservative views. Mizulina sees slapping as an "educational measure" and wants to do away with inequality. "If someone slaps an unruly child, they could face one or two years in prison," Mizulina said in parliament at the start of January. "But if a neighbor were to do that, all they face is an administrative offense."

Thousands of victims of domestic violence

Human rights advocate Anna Rivina, head of the project "Nasiliju.Net" (No to Violence) says there is a good reason for such inequality. "In a relationship between family members, the situation for the victim is much more difficult than when there is an altercation on the street," she said. "When the violence comes from a family member, you can't just go home and hide."

The term "domestic violence" that is so widely used in the West does not exist in Russian law, even though the phenomenon itself is very widespread in the country. Around 40 percent of all serious crimes occur within the confines of the family, said Rivina, citing police statistics. In 2013 alone, around 9,100 Russian women died as a consequence of domestic violence. Another 11,300 suffered severe injuries. And that's just the tip of the iceberg, Rivina says.

Encouraging violence in the home?

One woman who wishes to remain anonymous told DW about her own experience with domestic violence. "I called the police many times when my drunken husband would beat me or our children," she said. "Each time, I ended up writing a declaration against the introduction of criminal penalties." She says that it was her choice and that she only involved the police so that her husband would calm down faster. It worked, she says, adding that the new law won't change anything for her.

But it will change things for Natalia Nusinova from Moscow. In 2014, the man she was living with hit her. He threatened to throw her out of their high-rise apartment. When she defended herself with a knife, she hurt her attacker. Now, she faces up to 10 years in prison for grievous bodily harm. She wants to see a law that is tougher on the perpetrators and that better protects the victims.

Foreign criticism unwanted

The new law hasn't just elicited criticism from human rights activists in Russia, but also abroad. After the first reading of the bill in parliament, the Secretary General of the European Council, Thorbjorn Jagland, sent a letter to the leaders of the Duma. He expressed his concern and called on them to protect women and children from domestic violence. Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin rejected the letter as foreign interference in a domestic issue. He referred to a survey by the state opinion research institute WZIOM, which concluded that 60 percent of Russians supported more mild punishment for domestic violence. Most of those surveyed (79 percent) said they were against any form of violence within families. But every fifth respondent said it was acceptable under certain circumstances.

Read more:

[Russia should not decriminalise wife-beating](#)

Russian women denied protest against bill decriminalising domestic violence vow to keep fighting

By Sofia Lotto Persio

International Business Times (24.01.2017) - <https://yhoo.it/2k2o6wa> - As women's marches took over the streets of major cities on Saturday (21 January), a group of women in Russia are struggling to obtain permission to protest a bill that would decriminalise domestic violence.

The organisers were seeking permission to hold a rally on 28 January in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square, a largely pedestrian area south of the Kremlin and the Red Square where a mass rally against President Vladimir Putin was held in 2012. They submitted their request on 17 January, ahead of the 10-day deadline for such requests and estimated around 1000 participants.

The response from Moscow's mayoral office baffled them. It rejected the application stating: "There [were] no grounds for [organisers] to hold a public event with the declared number of participants." It also said that holding the event would interfere with the movement of pedestrians and vehicles across the city, "violating the rights of the citizens who are not participating in this event".

The women had been prepared to encounter some form of resistance, considering the government's intolerance of opposition views, especially when expressed through public protests. "I can't say that we are surprised, but we did not expect that we will be interfered in the implementation of our constitutional rights in such an explicit form. We understood that everything possible would be done to make us keep silent but it was a surprise that government played unlawfully," one of the group's spokespersons, Maria Kogan, told IBTimes UK. "The fact that we have to ask permission for our constitutional right is sad in and of itself, and the reasons of denial are baseless."

The organisers know their rights, as the three women who started the group were all students at Moscow State Academy of Law. The group grew to a core 16 members who started working organising a protest through Facebook and VKontakte (Russia's most popular social network), united by their feminist ideals and the desire to improve the status of women in their countries.

The group is however fighting back. They are appealing against the mayor's rejection, as they were not offered an alternative place for the rally, as required under the law. They are also applying for a permit for a new rally, in Sokolniki park on 4 February. The park's location, in the northern part of Moscow is not ideal, as it would not get as much attention. "This is a common theme with all of the rallies now, they are pushed to the sides, away from the public eye," Kogan complained. "But the problem with this law is pretty obvious and, if the law get through, it may affect a lot of people, so I believe people will join us anyway, and anywhere".

How the law would change

The bill decriminalising domestic violence passed a first reading in the Russian parliament (Duma), on 11 January, with an overwhelming majority of 368 votes in favour, one against and one abstention. The bill was proposed by Yelena Mizulina, a conservative MP chair of the parliamentary committee on family issues.

One of the main proponents of the "gay propaganda" laws, Mizulina first proposed the bill on 27 July. "Battery carried out toward family members should be an administrative offence. You don't want people to be imprisoned for two years and labelled a criminal for the rest of their lives for a slap," she said.

The bill will undergo a second reading on 25 January. It would make domestic violence - defined as the beating of a relative - a civil offence, punishable with a fine of up to 30,000 roubles (£405), arrest lasting between 10 or 15 days, or 60 to 120 hours of compulsory labour (which was introduced at the beginning of the year as an alternative to imprisonment). It would be treated as a criminal offence should the beating occur more than once a year, or if the crime was perpetrated as an act of hooliganism (which in Russian law encompasses any breach of public order) or is motivated by hatred or enmity. In this case, the punishment would be either compulsory labour or imprisonment up to two years.

While some activists were sceptical about the law's chances of success, Kogan said their group is concerned: "It is possible that this law will be approved, that is why we are doing everything we can to be heard by the authorities."

Organising the resistance

In less than two weeks, the protest gathered more support than the organisers were expecting, but they also faced criticism. Some accused them of ignoring male victims of domestic violence, although the organisers never claimed the rally would be for women only. Others told them they misunderstood the law. "In the Russian media this law is called 'law about the slap'," Kogan explained, saying that people think it would prevent children from being taken away from their parents if they have some accidental bruises. Other critics told them that nobody would attend the rally.

In fact, the women's rally is not the only protest against the law in Russia. "Women in Irkutsk [one of the largest cities in Siberia] decided to support us and they have their own meeting on 28 January. In several other cities there were protests too," Kogan said.

The Russian United Democratic Party Yabloko, a centre-left opposition party with currently no representation in the parliament have launched a campaign against the law. They invited people to speak out on social media, using the hashtag: "I'm against the law on decriminalisation of domestic violence".

Other activists have staged one-person protests, standing outside the Duma holding signs against the law. "I give birth to you, I kill you," read the sign held by women's rights activist Alena Popova, who plans to protest outside the parliament on the day of the second reading. The activist's banner, cited statistics stating that, of the 50,780 people suffering from domestic violence in 2015, 11,756 were minors. The same statistics show that 36,493 were women, and 5% were men.

According to official figures quoted by the UK foreign office, 12,000 women are killed in episodes of domestic violence in Russia, one every 40 minutes. The scale of the problem is slowly gaining momentum in the country. In 2016, a social media campaign invited people to share their experiences of sexual assault, domestic abuse and gender-based violence using the hashtag: "I am not afraid to speak." Thousands of stories poured in, breaking the wall of silence.

A growing movement

The progress in openly talking about abuse has also helped highlight cases of historical sexual assault. At the end of August, journalist Ekaterina Kronhous published a post on Facebook about an investigation conducted by a former alumna of School 57 in Moscow, revealing that a history teacher had sexual relations with underage students for 16 years. A month later, the authorities opened a criminal case against the teacher, Boris Meyerson. The school is a mix-gender institute where the Russian elite send their children, and is comparable to Eton's status in the UK. The scandal could no longer be ignored and it shook Russian society.

"This is an unprecedented and momentous event," Maria Mokhova, a director at Moscow's women's refuge Syostry (meaning 'sisters' in Russian) told the Moscow Times in July. "It is a big step forward for society as a whole to finally get rid of the taboo of talking about sexual abuse."

The massive scale of the women's marches on Saturday has impressed and inspired the women's group. In Russia, such protests are increasingly difficult to organise, partly due to the bureaucratic obstacles and partly because many have lost faith in the power of protest to achieve change. The women's group, however, have not lost all hope. "We were really glad to see so many women unite under the idea of standing up for their

rights," Kogan said. "We are all full of enthusiasm and we do not intend to give up the fight."

Russian bill decriminalizing domestic battery sails through first reading

By Tom Balmforth

RFL/RE (11.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2iOUBwd> - Russian legislators returned from recess by approving -- with almost unanimous support -- the first reading of a bill that would decriminalize assault in the family home.

The bill, which is in keeping with the conservative values espoused by President Vladimir Putin and has been protested by antidomestic abuse activists, seeks to downgrade assault inside the traditional family unit from a criminal offense to a misdemeanor.

Battery inside the home by family members remained a criminal offense in 2016, while cases of street assault -- say, between two men -- were legally decriminalized to a misdemeanor punishable by fine. The new legislation would remove this distinction.

Addressing the State Duma during the first reading, Olga Batalina, one of the bill's authors, on January 11 said the bill concerns non-serious assaults causing "bruises or grazes."

She recognized the problem of domestic abuse, but said there are better ways to combat it.

"What's important is prevention," she said. "What is important is the chance to help a person who has ended up in this situation. As you understand, help does not consist in bringing one member of the family to administrative or criminal account, but in stopping these things from happening in the future."

Andrei Isayev, first deputy director of the United Russia faction, told the RBK business and politics news organization that domestic assaults would only be a misdemeanor in the first instance; a secondary offense would be deemed criminal.

Already weak legislation

The bill has nonetheless prompted concerns that it would land a blow to Russia's already weak legislation on domestic abuse and send the wrong signals to society.

"The [bill] that the Duma is preparing to examine would only legalize the order of things that have strengthened in the minds of Russians: beating close ones is normal," wrote Olga Bobrova, an editor at Novaya Gazeta.

Two activists picketed the State Duma on January 11 to protest the bill. Alyona Popova, a prominent activist against domestic violence, held a placard with the ironic slogan "I created you, I'll kill you," adding that "in 2015, 11,756 boys and girls suffered from violent crimes in families."

Batalina has said the legislation aims to place minor assaults committed in a domestic context on a par with street assaults decriminalized last summer.

"There was objective bewilderment among people as to why conflicts inside the family, beatings of relatives are a crime, but the same action committed on the street is only an administrative offense," Batalina has said. "Our legislative bill proposes removing this conflict," she said.

In July, President Vladimir Putin signed legislation decriminalizing minor assault for first-time offenders. It is now punishable by a fine of up to 30,000 rubles, 15 days in jail, or up to 120 hours of community service.

Exempt from this legislation were domestic-abuse cases, which remained criminal.

The exemption was explained by a United Russia lawmaker, who wrote at the time: "We must not remove criminal punishment for assault inside the family since they [such assaults] are committed consciously and, consequently, are socially more dangerous than street [assaults]."

Female circumcision as senseless cruelty

Society acted for observing the rights of women of the northern Caucasus

By Attorney Anatoly Pchelintsev

Religiia i Pravo (26.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2cMGYZt> - A genuine squall of emotions was evoked by a recent statement of one of the prominent Muslim leaders of Russia with regard to so-called "female circumcision." At first, the chairman of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the northern Caucasus, Ismail Berdiev, declared that this is a good measure which supposedly "decreases the sexuality of women" and lowers the level of depravity in society. Then, after a wave of criticism against him, the mufti was forced to excuse himself. Berdiev noted that, of course, Islam does not prescribe doing "female circumcision," but it is practiced in the rural region of Dagestan.

Perhaps few in Russian society knew what "female circumcision" is, but having learned, they were horrified by this barbarian practice, which essentially cripples women. In Russia, religious associations are liquidated on trumped up charges and their literature is ruled to be extremist (as, for example, with Jehovah's Witnesses), but in this case the call rang out to inflict damage to the physical health of citizens from a religious leader. According to article 14 of the federal law on freedom of conscience, such calls are reason for an examination and they provide for a sanction all the way up to liquidation and prohibition of the activity of a religious association.

Of course, it is hardly likely that such measures will be applied to the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the northern Caucasus, much less to the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of the Karachay-Cherkess republic, which Ismail Berdiev also heads. In addition, for two decades Mufti Berdiev has been one of the most distinguished leaders of traditional Islam. Berdiev is a good politician and leader, because of whom to a great extent Karachay-Cherkess is considered one of the most peaceful republics of the northern Caucasus.

Nevertheless Ismail Berdiev tried to disavow his statement: "I do not call for circumcising women. This is not prescribed by Islam and it is simply impossible. I am speaking about the problem of depravity and about how a problem exists about which it is necessary to do something." However a sore subject has already been touched upon.

The office of prosecutor general of Russia received an appeal requesting an examination of the legality of the use of so-called "female circumcision" in the northern Caucasus. The author of the appeal was Diana Gurtskaia, a member of the Public Chamber of the RF. Before that a report about the practice of female circumcision in Dagestan was posted on the official website of the rights advocacy foundation "Legal Initiative." It noted, in particular, that the consequences of the operations are connected with a reduction of sensitivity and sexual desire in women who are subjected to this procedure. The report says that this is confirmed by both respondents practicing it and expert physicians. Female circumcision in the region is used mainly in mountain villages in Tsumadin, Botlikh, Tsuntin, and Bezhtinsk regions. As noted, girls up to three years of age are subjected to the operation and in rare cases, up to twelve years. Female circumcision is very rarely performed in a hospital, and frequently after an underground operation inflammation and bleeding occur.

Naturally the Ministry of Health also responded to this problem. An official representative of the Ministry of Health, Oleg Salagai, noted: "At the present time, the international medical community is agreed in the opinion that so-called female circumcision is a mutilating practice and it produces nothing positive."

It turned out that back in 2008 the World Assembly of Health adopted a resolution about the necessity of total rejection of this practice. In 2012 a similar resolution was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

A separate discussion was evoked by the moral aspect of this barbaric practice. The point is that initially Ismail Berdiev presented female circumcision as a good means to fight depravity. The mufti said, "If this were applied to all women, that would be very good. The Almighty created woman in order that she give birth to children and raise them. And this has nothing to do with that. Women do not cease to give birth because of this. But there would be less depravity."

In this case, the northern Caucasian leader was even corrected by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia. The head of the Department of Public Relations of FEOR, Borukh Gorin, cautiously noted that he understands "a man who thinks about how to combat debauchery and licentiousness in society. A believing person is surrounded by an enormous number of temptations." But nevertheless one is called to struggle with debauchery with spiritual means and not with physical correction of the human organism. Gorin said: "Destruction of depravity around us is not within our powers. It is in our powers to sanctify the space around us so that there simply is no place left for debauchery. In the book of the Song of Solomon and the psalms of David it is said that the honor of woman is within, true beauty, and true greatness is not flashy, not public, and in this sense nothing has changed since the time of King Solomon and King David."

Borukh Gorin called attention to how girls should be trained: "The genuine attention of a groom, a man, can be attracted only by internal beauty. Therefore, in working on fitness, on how your body appears, a girl should understand that she should work three times as much on her inner appearance and contents. Only by this will she be able to attract true love."

Finally, it would seem that an end to the attitude of Muslims toward female circumcision has been placed by the first deputy chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, Rushan Abbasov. In his opinion, the practice is totally alien to Islam: "Female circumcision is a pre-Islamic tradition, which was innate not only to the Arab world but also to other civilizations that were not in contact with the Semitic world. It is possible to say with certainty that female circumcision is more on an ethnic tradition, mainly innate to the African peoples, possibly having some ritual basis, and it is completely alien to Islamic ideology."

In the understanding of Muslims, the Almighty forbids doing any injury to one's body, and as regards male circumcision, this does not have any direct command in the Quran, but according to the Abrahamic tradition it is desirable. Hadiths of the Prophet which contain mention of female circumcision do not have status of reliability, which consequently does not permit their use as an argument.

The discussion about the statement on female circumcision by Ismail Berdiev has raised more profound problems about the position of women in Islam. But at the present time one would like to hope that the practice which is crippling girls in remote villages will be eradicated. This is the way this practice is treated in Africa, to which the attention of the world community has been turned for a long time. And in this case religious leaders can and should raise their voice in defense of women.

Background articles:

[Muslim female circumcision goes viral in Russian media](#)

August 18, 2016

[Numerous leaders in Moscow take on female circumcision question](#)

August 19, 2016

[Russia Religion News Current News Items](#)

Mufti of the North Caucasus for circumcision of all Russian women

Interfax Religion (17.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2beUGHu> - Chairman of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus Ismail Berdiyev speaks for women's circumcision.

"It is necessary to make circumcision to all women to reduce lechery, to reduce sexuality," the mufti told an Interfax-Religion correspondent on Wednesday.

He pointed out that the circumcision is practiced in some towns and villages in Dagestan.

According to Berdiyev, Islam does not oblige to make circumcision to women.

"But it is necessary to reduce women's sexuality. And if it is applied to all women, it will be very good. The Almighty created a woman to give birth to children, to bring them up. And it (circumcision - IF) has nothing to do with it. It does not prevent women from birth-giving. But it will reduce lechery," the interviewee of the agency resumed.

Circumcision of women will not solve the problem, spiritual life should be intensified, official of Russia's Jewish community believes

Interfax Religion (18.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2c2pvk3> - The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia official believes that female circumcision will not solve the problem of lechery, but accepts the problem of growing immorality in society.

"On one hand, I understand it (discussion on the topic of women's circumcision) - IF, I mean I understand a person, who reflects how to oppose immorality, lechery in society. Great number of temptations surrounds a believer. They are temptations for a believer, for non-believer it is just reality," head of the FJCR public relations Boruch Gorin told *Interfax-Religion*.

Thus, he commented on the words of chairman of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus Ismail Berdiyev, who believes it is necessary to reduce sexuality of the society, and if circumcision is applied to all women, "it will be very good," as according to the mufti, God created a woman for birth-giving, and circumcision "has nothing to do with it."

According to Gorin, there are two ways: one way is to try eliminate temptations, the other way is to strengthen your spiritual life, "so that it won't be a temptation for you."

"It can be compared to alpinism: people are climbing up to the top of the mountain. If the task is to reach the top, you can get there by a helicopter. But people do not want to go there by helicopters. It is not about the aim, it is about efforts. And these attempts legally or in some other way to eliminate temptations, seem to me as this helicopter platform on the top of the mountain. Many totalitarian theocracies try to achieve it, and we see that they do not succeed in it, at a certain stage people start rolling down and die," Gorin said.

HRWF statement on FGM in response to call for circumcision of women of Mufti of the North Caucasus

HRWF (23.08.2016) The circumcision of women, more commonly referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM), has been condemned and classified as a violation of human rights, as well as a grave health risk, by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) [\(1\)](#), along with countless other NGO's and civil society organization working to end this barbaric phenomenon.

In addition to the health risks, the rationale put forward by Mufti Ismail Berdiyev, that women were put on earth for child-rearing and that they should be mutilated to curb their sexuality, plays into the antiquated and deluded trope of woman as mother/sexual temptress. This has the sole purpose of promulgating the repression of women. Women are human beings with the full spectrum of rights that men have, and are not mere objects to be used solely for the procreation of the human race.

There is also no religious basis for FGM and any attempt to justify the act of mutilating a woman's genitals in the name of religion (or any other reason) is unfounded.