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# Gruesome Family Killing Highlights Russian Domestic Abuse Problem

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Domestic violence complaints are rarely taken seriously in Russia, where many believe that a husband who occasionally slaps his wife around should not be treated as a criminal.

Shortly before her violent death, Yulia Belova submitted a handwritten complaint to the police, saying her husband had threatened to kill and dismember her and her children, according to investigators.

It was one of many police reports she filed between October 2014 and July 2015 saying that her husband, Oleg Belov — who now stands accused of killing his six children and his mother, as well as his pregnant wife — had been beating and threatening the family, the Investigative Committee said in a statement Wednesday.

Police shelved the complaints, according to investigators.

Details of the family's disputes, including Belova's handwritten statement, now listed among

the case materials, began to emerge after Belova's dismembered remains, along with those of her children, were found in the family's apartment in the city of Nizhny Novgorod this week. The gruesome murder horrified many in Russia and prompted much scrutiny of police handling of the complaints, and much finger-pointing.

The Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case on charges of negligent homicide against the local police chief, his deputy, a department head and two officers in the city for allegedly ignoring Belova's complaints. The last complaint dates from July, according to the Investigative Committee, just days before her death.

"The claimants' arguments for several months were left without due investigation, and district police officers, with the agreement of their chiefs, issued decisions declining to open a criminal case," the Investigative Committee said in a statement.

"The criminal negligence by police officials has allowed Belov to commit the cruel crime," the statement said.

Domestic violence complaints are rarely taken seriously in Russia, where many men — and even some women — believe that a husband who occasionally slaps his wife around is acting within his authority and should not be treated as a criminal. Meanwhile, police "try to not interfere with family scandals," in the words of a report by the Moscow Helsinki Group.

According to Interior Ministry figures cited by ANNA National Center for the Prevention of Violence in a 2010 report, about 14,000 women in Russia die every year "at the hands of husbands or other relatives," while violence of some form occurs in one out of four families in the country, and domestic disputes account for two-thirds of all homicides.

The figures may still under-represent the scope of domestic violence in Russia, according to the Moscow Helsinki Group, because many battered women avoid filing police reports, fearing they would be ignored anyway.

Suggestions that Russian women should not make a big deal out of domestic abuse has come even from children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov.

"The constant excessive use of the term 'domestic violence' is a way of brainwashing, turning into zombies, intimidating families and parents," Astakhov wrote on his Instagram page this spring. "The family is the safest place. A lot more crimes are committed in public places, on transport and in stores. Let's treat the family with care."

Belov, the suspect in the latest multiple murder case, had a history of violence, was known to local social workers and had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, according to his mother-in-law Valentina Zaitseva, state news agency TASS reported.

He was arrested near Zaitseva's home in the Vladimir region, about 220 kilometers from Nizhny Novgorod, prompting media speculation that he might have been heading to kill his mother-in-law as well.

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