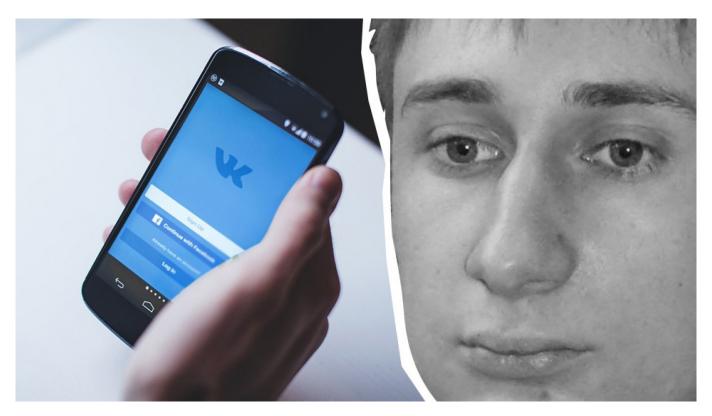


Autistic Man Charged in Russia With Extremism Over Social Media Post

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Artur Smirnov / change.org / MT

A Russian court has charged an autistic man with extremism for inciting hatred toward women online, an anti-extremism monitoring group has said.

Russian social media users are regularly prosecuted for sharing, liking or posting images found to cause racial or religious discord. Until recently, Russia's anti-extremist legislation — which can land defendants behind bars for up to 5 years — has rarely <u>targeted</u> gender-related posts.

Related article: Russian Feminist Reports Facing Extremism Probe For 'Inciting Hatred Toward Males'

Artur Smirnov, 27, was charged with extremism on Aug. 20 for an image he had posted on the Vkontakte social network in 2014, the anti-extremist SOVA Center reported last week.

The NGO described the image — which depicts a man hitting a woman — as being "demeaning" toward women, but said that it should not be used as evidence in a criminal prosecution.

The defendant's mother, Inga Smirnova, issued a call last week for an end to the criminal prosecution of her autistic son.

"Why is such a 'dangerous' picture freely available? Why isn't it deleted? Why isn't anyone else prosecuted for it?" Smirnov's mother wrote.

"Because a normal person would never guess that the image has anything to do with extremism. Let alone an autistic person."

A petition launched by Smirnova on the Change.org websited has gathered 120,000 <u>signatures</u> in about a week.

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