

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 [targeted](#) 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 website has gathered 120,000 [signatures](#) in about a week.

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