

Russia's Domestic Violence Problem Is 'Exaggerated,' Justice Ministry Says

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A protester in St. Petersburg rallies for the passage of a domestic violence law. **Sergei Konkov / TASS**

The Russian government doesn't see domestic violence as a "serious problem" and believes that its scale is exaggerated, the country's Justice Ministry said in an official response to Europe's human rights court obtained by the Kommersant business daily.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) this summer had asked Russia to respond to questions regarding four cases in which women accused Russian authorities of failing to protect them from domestic abuse and discrimination. In its series of questions, the ECHR asked whether Russian authorities recognizes the extent and seriousness of domestic violence in the country.

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While the government acknowledges that domestic violence "unfortunately exists in Russia,

as in any other country,” the scale and severity of its impact on Russian women “are quite exaggerated,” Kommersant [quoted](#) the Justice Ministry as saying Tuesday.

The Justice Ministry document goes on to say that men, not women, are the unsung victims of domestic violence, adding that there is “no evidence” that the majority of victims in Russia are women.

“It is logical to assume that male victims suffer more from discrimination in such cases,” Kommersant quoted the ministry as saying. “They are in the minority, and they are not expected to ask for protection from abuse by family members, especially if they are abused by the opposite sex.”

The ministry also accused the four women of misinterpreting the situation with domestic violence in Russia and of trying to “undermine legal mechanisms which already exist in Russian law, as well as the government’s efforts to improve the situation.”

The remarks sparked widespread backlash on social media.

“The government believes that the need for living women is exaggerated,” one Twitter user [wrote](#), while another [said](#) “The need for such a government is pretty exaggerated.”

The Justice Ministry later [said](#) that its comments were “taken out of context.” Speaking to the state-run TASS news agency, the ministry also claimed that Kommersant's translations of its response from English into Russian were incorrect.

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In February 2017, President Vladimir Putin approved a law to decriminalize most forms of domestic violence, downgrading punishments for first-time offenders.

Calls to re-criminalize domestic violence in Russia have intensified amid the high-profile case of three sisters facing murder charges for killing their abusive father, and after a 24-year-old historian was brutally killed by her romantic partner and former professor in St. Petersburg.

According to the independent Levada Center polling agency, nearly one-third of Russians have [encountered](#) domestic violence in their own families or among acquaintances. About 14,000 women die in Russia each year at the hands of husbands or other relatives, according to a 2010 United Nations report.

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