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Russian Domestic Violence Victim's Death Blamed on 'Negligent' Cops

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Vera Pekhteleva, a 23-year-old student, died last month after her ex-boyfriend beat her for hours. **Facebook**

Russian activists have placed the blame for a young domestic violence victim's death in Siberia on the police, alleging that they failed to respond as she was being beaten to death in a case that has sparked national attention this week.

Women's rights activist Alyona Popova claimed that police in the city of Kemerovo ignored repeated calls from concerned neighbors as 23-year-old student Vera Pekhteleva's ex-boyfriend beat her for 3.5 hours at his apartment last month. The neighbors eventually managed to break down the apartment door themselves only to find that Pekhteleva had already died.

Two male police officers have been charged with criminal negligence for not responding to the calls, which Popova said means they could get off with just a warning and a fine.

"Our state currently defends the interests of the killer and the police. This attitude towards

domestic violence has already become the norm in Russia," Popova wrote on Facebook, attaching alleged call transcripts showing that police operators were more concerned with the neighbors' rude tone rather than their cries for help.

On Friday, a district court in Kemerovo returned the case to prosecutors to requalify the officers' negligence charges to more serious ones.

According to the regional Investigative Committee, police had been notified that Pekhteleva was being beaten but didn't dispatch officers to the scene. While the officers did not plead guilty, investigators said they collected "irrefutable evidence."

Pekhteleva's ex-boyfriend Vladislav Kanyus has been charged with murder for inflicting 56 bodily injuries on her and strangling her with a cord when she stopped by to pick up her clothes after their break-up.

Popova said that Kanyus would be tried under the murder charges, which carry a prison sentence of six to 15 years, despite Pekhteleva's family petitioning for tougher charges of murder with particular cruelty, which is punishable by a life sentence.

Pekhteleva's mother told local television that the court refused to requalify his charges for more serious ones.

Russian activists and lawmakers have been pushing to reverse a 2017 law decriminalizing first-time domestic violence offenses, claiming the law emboldens domestic abusers and fosters a culture of impunity.

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