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‘Our Dreams Are Shattered’: Russian Soldiers’ Wives Learn of Infidelity on the Front

By Angelina Trefilova

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A mobilization point in Moscow in 2022. **Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency**

“Military men are my red flag now,” writes Yevgenia, a blogger from the Black Sea resort city of Sochi on Instagram.

In 2022, Yevgenia’s then-husband left to fight in Ukraine. A year later, she discovered he had been unfaithful.

She learned of his affair by accident when his mistress mistakenly added her to a secret Telegram chat. Immediately, she noticed that the woman’s phone number had a +949 code — the dialing prefix for the occupied Donetsk region. Using the number, Yevgenia tracked down the woman’s social media profile. When she saw photos of the woman with her husband, the pieces fell into place.

Yevgenia soon took to Instagram — which is banned in Russia — to share her story. Her most popular video, in which she recounts how she discovered the affair, has garnered more than 5 million views. Women quickly filled the comments with their own similar experiences.

"Mine met the 'love of his life' over there and already got married," wrote one of the military wives with a crying-laughing emoji. "I guess my kids and I were just passing through."

On her blog, Yevgenia now offers advice on how to spot a cheating husband at the front, mocks soldiers' infidelity, shares insights on psychology and celebrates the fact that she no longer has to wait for a husband to return from war.

Yevgenia is far from alone.

"Filing for divorce today. Military wives, stay strong," another woman, known as Andreevna, wrote in a viral TikTok post. The video has amassed 81,000 views and her blog now has 51,000 followers.

Many wives turn to VKontakte groups and Telegram channels — like one named Overheard at the Special Military Operation — to share their stories and seek advice. Posts about soldiers' infidelity also appear on popular Russian platforms for psychological counseling.

Upon discovering their husbands' infidelity, women face a difficult choice: forgive and try to move forward, or file for divorce. The decision is often complicated by shared mortgages, children and the high salaries of military personnel, which many families rely on.

"He admitted [the affair] himself, said it was a mistake. I feel stuck: on one hand, I want a divorce because this betrayal has completely destroyed me. But on the other — there's the [mortgaged] apartment. If we split, I'll have to figure out how to manage it on my own," writes one military wife.

"I'm on my second marriage, and I want to tell you — a wife is the first heir," says Nastya, a 25-year-old blogger from Siberia. She reads tarot cards to predict the fate of Russian soldiers and shares stories of women who turn to her for guidance. She charges 2,000 rubles ($23) per reading.

"You'll get divorced and end up heartbroken and out-on-your-ass broke," she warns military wives.

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If a soldier dies at the front, his widow receives a payout of 5.2 million rubles ($60,758). Pregnant military wives are entitled to monthly state benefits of 39,000 rubles ($458) and can later secure university admission for their children through special state quotas.

The mothers of young women also seek advice in online chats. "I've seen firsthand how families fall apart and how husbands in the 'special military operation' start relationships behind their wives' backs. Now I'm terrified for my daughter," writes the mother of an 18-year-old girl who recently started dating a soldier.

In the comments under such stories, some offer words of support, while others doubt the wives' side of the story and blame Ukrainian women for their husbands' infidelity.

"Wives, tell me — how do you even find out about your husband's cheating while he's deployed? How does it even happen if they're constantly under fire?" asks an anonymous user in the Overheard at the Special Military Operation VKontakte group.

Sex work in the occupied territories

Soldiers who sign contracts with the Russian Defense Ministry are entitled to 30 to 60 days of leave per year, depending on their seniority and deployment conditions. But not all of them return home to their families — some stay in occupied Ukrainian territories to spend time with sex workers.

The independent Vyorstka news website found that demand for sex services is high among Russian troops in Donetsk, Luhansk and the other occupied Ukrainian regions.

Many soldiers find sex workers through Telegram, where groups like Dating in Donetsk are flooded with offers from pimps and sex workers. The average hourly rate is 15,000 rubles ($170).

"We have girlfriends, private visits (to your location) and apartments available," one woman writes in the Dating in Donetsk group.

Beyond "traditional" sex work, these Telegram chats also offer "extra services," including erotic massages and kissing.

Soldiers use sex as a coping mechanism, psychologist Galina Petrakova told The Moscow Times.

"In a climate of heightened tolerance for violence, which war inevitably fosters, sexual exploitation or sex services become an accepted and uncondemned way of coping with trauma," Petrakova said.

"We made plans, dreamed of the future, and now it has all turned out to be a lie," says another woman who discovered her fiancé's infidelity just before their wedding. "All our dreams were shattered because of this damn war."

Military wives describe infidelity as a turning point in their relationships, but in their social media posts, they rarely reflect on the war itself.

"How a person interprets infidelity depends on their cognitive patterns. Assessments like 'he's a hero, he's protecting me' or 'he's not on the front lines, so it's not that bad' help regulate emotions more effectively," said psychologist Petrakova.

"Others, such as 'he betrayed me' or 'he doesn't love me anymore,' intensify emotions and make them harder to process," she said.

But sometimes, emotions win out.

In September, a military wife from the city of Nizhnevartovsk in western Siberia sent a funeral wreath to her husband at the front after learning of his affair. Along with the wreath, she included a piggy bank inscribed with the words: "As broke as you were, so you'll remain."

The soldier demanded an investigation into why his wife, whom he called "mentally unstable," was still employed in education. He later sent a video of himself unboxing the "gift" to the police.

For some, revenge comes in the form of funeral wreaths. Others find it in monetizing their painful experiences.

Yevgenia from Sochi now sells "Human Design" consultations to other women, offering insights into personality types, diet and "vulnerability zones" during a one-hour video call. She charges 4,000 rubles ($46) per session. She also provides blog development coaching for the same price, as well as personality analysis based on a photo for 1,990 rubles ($23).

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