

## **Political Abuse of Psychiatry in Russia (as of November 4, 2024)**

*International Federation Human Rights in Mental Health-FGIP and Andrei Sakharov Research Center for Democratic Development (Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania) conduct monitoring of political abuse of psychiatry in Russia since the beginning of 2000s. The earliest case documented in this paper dates back to 2015.*

The monitoring is conducted using open sources; we do not have the ability to obtain information directly from within the country. According to our assumptions, the actual number of such cases may be significantly higher.

According to the human rights project *OVD-Info*, as reported by the independent media outlet *Agentstvo. Novosti*, the proportion of cases resulting in involuntary psychiatric treatment among all politically motivated convictions increased from less than 2% in the 2010s and early 2020s to 3.3% in 2023 and 2.5% in 2024 (as of May 2024). Based on this and on our own observations, we conclude that what was once known as punitive psychiatry during Soviet times has re-emerged as a significant tool for suppressing dissent and opposition since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and continues to serve that purpose in 2024.

Consolidated table with a list of all abuses:

<https://www.sakharovcenter-vdu.eu/research-and-publications/political-abuse-of-psychiatry-in-russia/>

Our latest report from March, 2024:

<https://www.sakharovcenter-vdu.eu/assets/files/conclusions-and-diagrams-march2024-eng.pdf>

Our report from August, 2023:

<https://www.sakharovcenter-vdu.eu/assets/files/a5-report-political-abuse-2023-09-12.pdf>

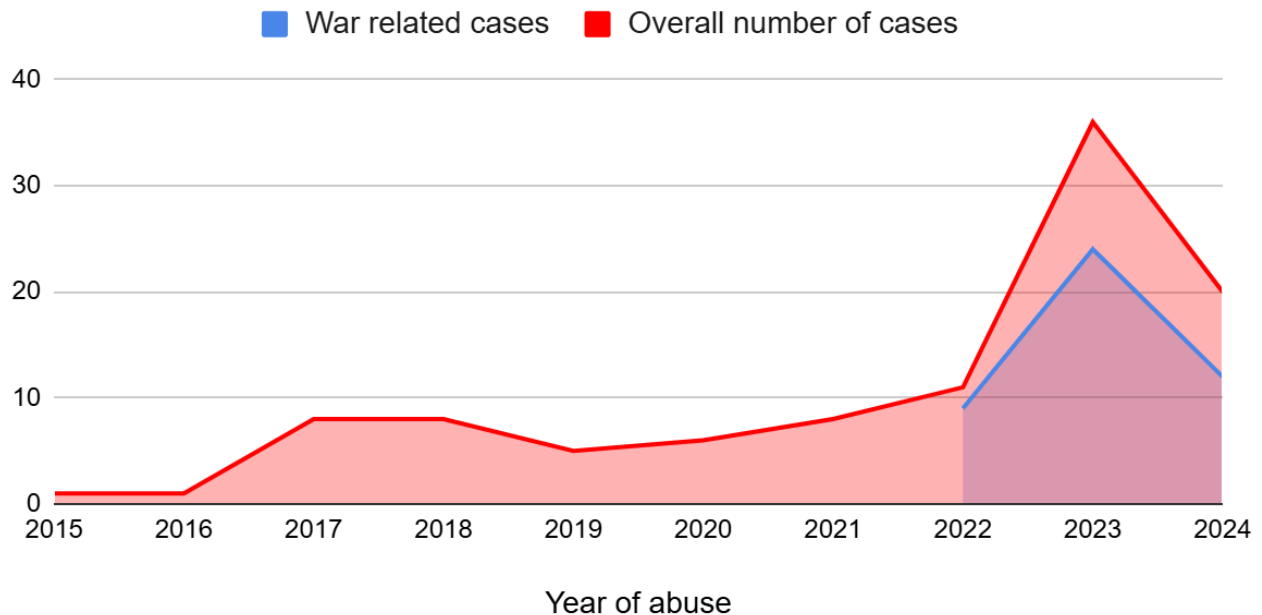
**Please, find below our latest observations and statistics based on our monitoring:**

- Overall number of cases through the years
- Number of people currently hospitalized by court decisions
- Geography
- Victims by age group and gender
- New amendments to the law on psychiatric care

## Overall number of cases through the years

### Political abuse of psychiatry in Russia in 2015-2024\*

\*by November 4, 2024



According to our monitoring, since 2015, there have been 104 cases of abuse involving 101 victims in Russia, with three individuals targeted twice.

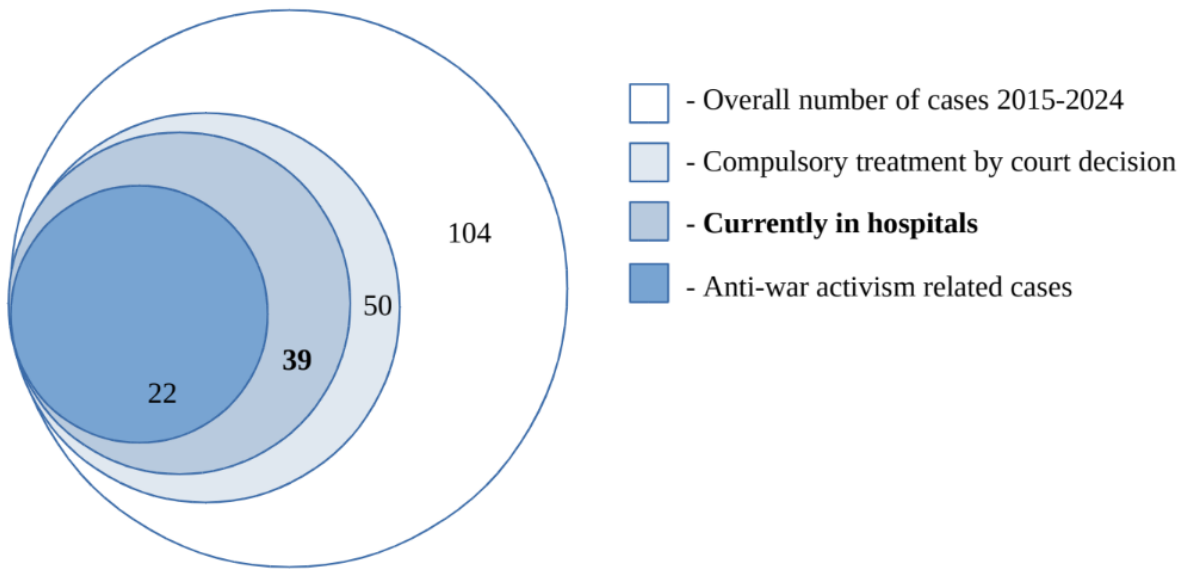
In 2022, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the number of abuses increased significantly. In total, 67 cases took place in 2022-2024. In many of these cases, psychiatry was weaponized as a means to punish and deter anti-war activism (see the graphic).

In 2023, we recorded 36 cases of abuse, 24 of which were related to the war. While 2024 is not yet over, preliminary data suggests that, although the situation may not be as severe as in 2023, it remains almost twice as alarming as in 2022.

## Number of people currently hospitalized by court decisions

We define political abuse of psychiatry as a range of actions, from threats by investigators to hospitalize detainees, or situations where individuals are taken to psychiatric hospitals simply because police officers deem their behavior problematic, to more severe forms of abuse. These include inpatient forensic evaluations that could have been conducted on an outpatient basis, as well as court rulings declaring individuals legally incompetent, leading to their involuntary confinement in psychiatric hospitals for indefinite periods.

Current Hospitalization by Court Decisions\*  
\*by November 2, 2024



As of November 4, 2024, we have recorded 50 court rulings ordering involuntary psychiatric treatment since 2015. Currently, 39 individuals remain hospitalized, 22 of whom were accused of anti-war activities.



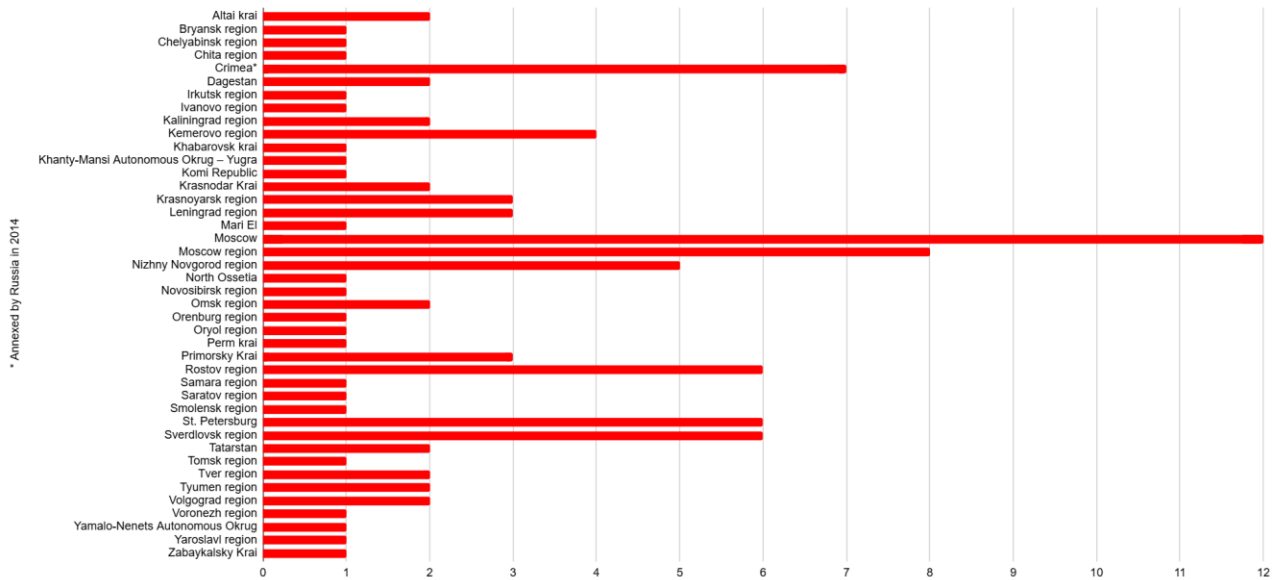
One of such individuals is Timofey Rudenko, a Moscow-based former military psychologist and reserve lieutenant, who spoke out online against the war in Ukraine in 2022. What followed was a Kafkaesque ordeal: repeated arrests on minor charges, tortures, allegations of supporting terrorism based on disputed Telegram comments, and, ultimately, in 2024, a court order for involuntary psychiatric treatment. Now confined to a psychiatric hospital, Rudenko is recognized as a political prisoner by *Memorial*.

Photo: [https://gdb.currenttime.tv/01000000-c0a8-0242-46d4-08db78e437ab\\_w320\\_r0\\_s\\_d2.jpg](https://gdb.currenttime.tv/01000000-c0a8-0242-46d4-08db78e437ab_w320_r0_s_d2.jpg)

# Geography

## Abuse of Psychiatry in Russia in 2015-2024 by REGION

As of November 4, 2024



The Moscow region and the city of Moscow, which is an administratively separate entity, account for almost 25% of all cases of abuse of psychiatry. Following these areas are annexed Crimea, Rostov and Sverdlovsk regions, St. Petersburg. Despite the wide geographic spread of these violations, many occur in the capital region of the country, where one would expect greater attention to human rights, easier access for lawyers and human rights defenders, and more public awareness. In our view, this pattern suggests that these abuses are not isolated incidents, but rather a systemic issue, likely sanctioned at the highest levels of government.

One of the stories that took place in Moscow, is of Maxim Lypkan, a young activist from Moscow. When he was just 17, he organized a memorial for Ukrainian war victims at a Moscow monument for Stalin's repression victims, leading to a 13-day detention. After turning 18, he applied to hold an anti-war rally in front of the FSB building,



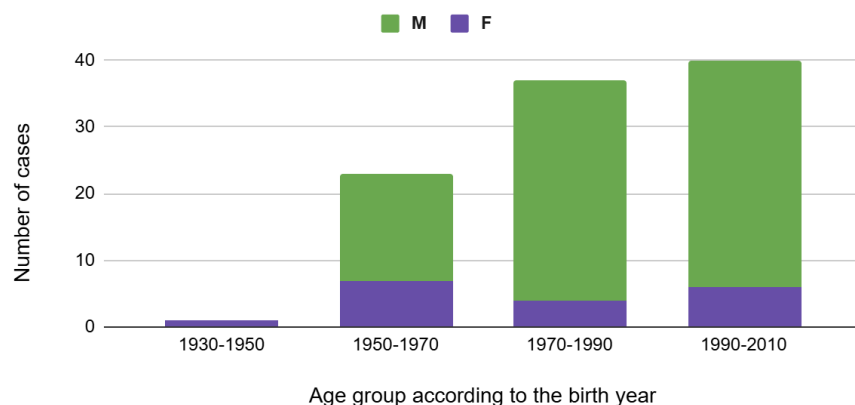
symbolically naming it “Year of Hell”— a move that sparked greater scrutiny. Authorities rejected his rally application, and shortly after, he was detained, searched, and charged with spreading “false information” about the Russian army. Maxim endured both physical and psychological pressure in pretrial detention. In mid-2023, he was evaluated at the Serbsky Institute and was later ordered into a psychiatric hospital by the Odintsovo court, which declared him legally incompetent.

Photo: A screenshot from a video shared by Lypkan on his Telegram channel: <https://t.me/lypkanmk/194>

## Victims by age group and gender

### Victims of the political abuse of psychiatry in Russia by age group and gender\*

\*according to available information



Since March 2024, when we published our last report, the age profile of victims has shifted, skewing younger. Previously, middle-aged individuals were most frequently targeted, reflecting a broader trend in Russia where women, the elderly, and minors face less extensive and severe persecution. Now, the largest age group among victims consists of those born after 1990, including several born between 2005 and 2008, some of whom were arrested when still minors.

One of them, Oleg Berezin from Krasnokamensk (Chita Region), was 17 years old when he was arrested for posting “extremist” content on the Telegram channel *Siberian Liberation Movement*. Unable to tolerate the war in Ukraine and other aspects of Putin’s Russia, he published calls for Siberia’s secession and active resistance against the war machine. As a result, he was institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital by court order.

Predictably, women are targeted by political abuse of psychiatry far less often than men. However, there were 3 women targeted in 2024, and one of them—Olga Suvorova, a Krasnoyarsk opposition



figure, member of the *Soft Power* political movement, and a member of the initiative group of former presidential candidate Ekaterina Duntsova. After accusing a police officer of assault in 2023, she was charged with false denunciation and ordered to undergo psychiatric outpatient evaluation. The evaluation results, among other things, stated: "She is focused on helping others....," "From school age, she actively participated in the school's public life; actively participated in the region's public life, which deviates from the usual person's behavior..." Based on this, the court ordered Olga to undergo compulsory inpatient forensic psychiatric evaluation for 30 days. She was detained and forcibly taken to a psychoneurological dispensary in Krasnoyarsk, where, according to Olga, conditions were humiliating. Phones were only allowed three times a week, hot water for tea had to be begged for, and staff exploited patients as labor.

Photo: Facebook page of the *Soft Power* movement <https://www.facebook.com/myagkaya.sila/photos>

## **New amendments to the law on psychiatric care**

On September 1, 2024, amendments to the law *On Psychiatric Care and Guarantees of Citizens' Rights in Its Provision*, adopted in August 2023, came into force. According to lawmakers, these amendments, which regulate certain patient rights, aim to curb the arbitrary actions of medical institutions. However, many independent experts believe the new law provides more opportunities for abuse.

In particular, all visits to psychiatric hospital patients are now governed by a special document outlining strict conditions, including: no other patients may be present during visits; visits require the patient's or their legal representative's consent (if the patient isn't able to provide consent, the decision is made by a doctor); visitors must remove outerwear and wear indoor shoes; they must not interact with other patients; and they must show no signs of alcohol or drug intoxication.

Lawyer Dmitry Bartenyev argues that these rules will impose restrictions rather than safeguard patient rights, effectively giving hospitals a ready list of excuses to deny visitors. For instance, a hospital could claim there's no place to store a visitor's coat or allege signs of intoxication, preventing the visit.

Additionally, the amendments create internal contradictions within the law itself. While the law allows visits from lawyers, NGO representatives, and clergy, the new rules restrict visitors to relatives and legal representatives. This also conflicts with laws on legal representation, public oversight of detention facilities, and social services, as communication with lawyers cannot be subject to such conditions.

The amendments also refine the procedure for restricting patient rights. At first glance, this appears to be a positive development, as it emphasizes the temporary nature of such restrictions and prescribes a formal procedure. Restrictions must now be documented, specifying their reason, nature, duration, and the responsible doctor. However, experts warn that in practice, these temporary measures could become permanent: restrictions are limited to 15 days but can be repeatedly renewed, with no mechanism for appeal. Among the possible restrictions are bans on sending and receiving mail (including complaints to government agencies), limitations on phone use, restrictions on the number, duration, and privacy of visits, and control over personal belongings.

As of now, there is no information on how these amendments are being implemented in practice.