

Bad news for survivors of sexual violence after Ukraine ombudsman discredited

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The Ukrainian ombudsman Lyudmila Denisova has been sacked for exaggerating the number of rapes by Russian invaders. Her foolishness has done great harm to the struggle for women's rights in this war. Victims of sexual violence in Ukraine will find it harder to make a complaint. The Kremlin propaganda campaign is also falsely accusing Russian feminists of embezzling funds collected with "fake rape" stories.

In May, the ombudsman for human rights in Ukraine, Lyudmila Denisova, reported hundreds (if not thousands) of cases of rape of Ukrainian civilians by Russian soldiers. Among the cases she described were particularly brutal cases of rape of infants. She received the information from her daughter, who is in charge of the hotline project for such appeals. Rape in war is always another weapon of war. Several cases of rape and pregnancy after rape (including teenage pregnancies) have already been documented and proven by international organisations. These heinous crimes are hard to prove and survivors of war rape do not often go public out of fear for the lives of their loved ones. This is why truth, facts and very balanced statements are always important when talking about war rape. Unfortunately, it turned out that Ombudsman Denisova was spreading distorted and false facts about cases of sexualised violence. Ukraine itself initiated an investigation into Denisova's allegations and the prosecutor's office summoned her for questioning: an inspection of her hotline revealed that it had received not thousands of calls, as Denisova claimed, but just under a hundred. As we have used Denisova's data twice in our publications, we feel obliged to publish this text. While it is difficult to assess the harm Denisova has done to war victims, such machinations will certainly diminish the credibility of the testimony and testimonies of real raped women and girls who continue to come to volunteer organisations for help and medical and psychological care. Russian propaganda is already exploiting Denisova's negligence to the full, claiming that no rape exists and that it is all "fake". Denisova herself was fired after the investigation and interrogation. It is interesting that this story has also affected Feminist Anti-War Resistance activists: hundreds of publications about us and our movement commissioned by the authorities have appeared online. The legend in them was that we were collecting money for raped Ukrainian women, who allegedly do not exist, and then we were embezzling the money ourselves. What really happened: we supported the Belarussian financial humanitarian fundraising for rape kits. Rape kits are bought and given by aid organisations when a rape victim approaches them. Many organisations buy the kits at the beginning of the war so that they can be distributed as soon as possible and so that survivors do not have to wait. Rape kits include receptacles and solutions for the rapid collection of biological evidence for transfer to the police for examination. A request for such kits has been made several times by Ukrainian women's aid organisations. This is the request we are supporting. We hope that all victims of sexualised violence in this war will receive support and assistance, and that incompetent agents and propaganda will stop using human pain for their political benefit. There are indeed many raped in this war, evidence is already being collected, cases are being filed and trials are taking place. There is and has been no need to artificially and forcibly inflate the number of those who have applied and suffered. Unfortunately, there are more of them every day.

Russian Feminist Anti-war resistance (FAS)

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