

Drug Rehab Workers Jailed as 'Revenge'

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Three workers with a private anti-drug foundation were jailed by a Sverdlovsk region court Tuesday on kidnapping charges that the organization's head called revenge by corrupt local authorities.

Russia's top drug abuse expert said the defendants fell victim to an absence of laws regulating the work of private rehab centers.

A Nizhny Tagil court convicted Yegor Bychkov, head of the local branch of the Yekaterinburg-based City Without Drugs foundation, and his co-workers Alexander Vasyagin and Vitaly Pugin of kidnapping four people and keeping a fifth person hostage in 2008.

The charges were linked to the defendants' practice of locking up drug users for treatment, court spokeswoman Yelena Sorokina told The Moscow Times by telephone.

Bychkov and Vasyagin were sentenced to 3 1/2 and four years, respectively, in a maximum-security prison, Sorokina said.

Pagin, who was a minor when the incident took place in 2008, got off with a suspended sentence of 18 months, Interfax reported.

All three filed appeals Tuesday.

City Without Drugs head Yevgeny Roizman said the sentences were “revenge from local law enforcement agencies” irked by the foundation's campaign against local drug dealers.

About 140 “hushed-up” cases against dealers were reopened in recent years after the organization complained to the Prosecutor General's Office, Roizman said by telephone.

The five purported victims backed the defendants during the trial, reversing incriminating testimonies that Roizman said had been "beaten out" of them by investigators. But the court testimony did not affect the ruling.

"For some reason, the court says that the testimony of sober people means nothing but testimony of high drug users does," Bychkov's lawyer Anastasia Uderevskaya said by telephone.

President Dmitry Medvedev ordered the Prosecutor General's Office to look into the case Tuesday, Interfax reported.

Yevgeny Bryun, the chief drug abuse expert with the Health and Social Development Ministry, spoke up for Bychkov and the other defendants at a news conference Tuesday.

"Bychkov's tragedy stems from the fact that we have no laws regulating [drug] prevention and the rehabilitation of drug users," Bryun said.

"The intentions were good. I have no doubt about this," said Bryun, who heads the Research and Practice Center for Drug Abuse Studies in Moscow.

About 550,000 people, including some 30,000 in Moscow, are officially registered as drug users, but the real figure might reach 1.5 million nationwide and 200,000 to 250,000 in the capital, Bryun said.

City Without Drugs has been combating illegal drugs since 1999, starting with the release of an online video depicting law enforcement officials and drug dealers partying together, Roizman said on his [blog](#).

The foundation has a history of run-ins with the law. Two employees have been jailed on rape charges, the regional news web site Uralinform.ru said. A third was convicted of drug dealing in 2003, Compromat.ru reported, and two others were jailed in Khanty-Mansiisk in 2005 on charges of beating a patient to death, Kommersant [reported](#).

The founders of City Without Drugs have also been accused of establishing the group to promote the failed State Duma bid of reputed mafia boss Alexander Khabarov in 1999, the daily said in another [report](#).

Roizman himself served a two-year prison term in Soviet times for theft, fraud and illegal weapons possession, My-cities.ru reported. He served as an independent Duma deputy from

2003 to 2007.

Editor's note: An earlier version of this article misidentified the head of the Nizhny Tagil branch of the City Without Drugs foundation, convicted with his coworkers of kidnapping four people and keeping a fifth person hostage in 2008. His name is Yegor Bychkov, not Yevgeny Bychkov.

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