

Pakistan: Chemical Castration

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Chemical castration is no remedy for curbing sexual violence, any more than is public hanging, which an enraged citizenry has been increasingly demanding as punishment for rapists. The procedure does, however, give the impression of being proactive. It could silence those who believe the government is not doing enough to tackle a crime that seems to have assumed alarming proportions.

On Tuesday, President Arif Alvi [signed off](#) on the Anti-Rape Ordinance, 2020, that allows for chemical castration of those convicted of rape. Contrary to the earlier draft however, the perpetrator's consent will not be required for the procedure to be carried out; rather it will be at the discretion of the judge to impose the punishment for a period ranging from six months to life.

This is not to say that the legislation has no redeeming features. For instance, it mandates the setting up of special courts for speedy trials of rape cases, which would spare victims the distress caused by long-drawn-out legal proceedings; and making their identification a punishable offence may encourage more victims to come forward. The ordinance also stipulates that anti-rape crisis cells will ensure medico-legal examination of victims within six hours, which would improve the chances of putting together a prosecutable case. However, the ordinance falls short in several significant respects.

For one, the punishment of chemical castration is impractical in Pakistan's context and raises serious ethical concerns. Secondly, it demonstrates a lack of understanding about the crime of rape. While studies show that chemical castration can drastically cut recidivism rates, it is no quick fix. The treatment must be continuous to remain effective. Is our criminal justice system so efficient that it can keep track of these individuals and bring them in for their injections at regular intervals? If they are to be imprisoned and also subjected to chemical castration, the latter course is redundant. It compounds the fact that chemical castration is a cruel and unusual punishment. Adopting this path puts us on the wrong side of international law that holds that invasive medical treatments require explicit consent of the individual.

Moreover, rape is a crime of power; to reduce it to a crime of lust disregards the social context with which it is inextricably linked. Pakistan's patriarchal culture denies women agency over their bodies while outmoded notions cast them as repositories of family 'honour'. That, coupled with a culture of machismo, means women are always potential 'prey'. Rape is an instrument with which to demonstrate power, to retaliate against another man, or simply, to put a woman 'in her place'. Children of course, are the most vulnerable in this hierarchy of power. What is needed is better criminal investigation resulting in higher certainty of punishment, and a sea change in social attitudes. That is the longer but far more certain route to reducing sexual crimes.

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