

Chemical castration for sex offenders: US territory passes law to prevent rapes

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Washington: Faced with a rate of 64.2 reported rapes per 100,000 people -- more than double the US national average of 25.2 - the US island territory of Guam plans to chemically castrate convicted sex offenders.

The Guam Legislature Thursday passed by a narrow 8-7 vote a controversial bill for the creation of a pilot programme to screen and refer convicted sex offenders to undergo anti-androgen treatment, or chemical castration, one week before their release.

Of the 50 states, only Alaska had a higher rate of rapes -- 87.6 per 100,000 people, according to USA Today.

"This is a good day for the island of Guam," said Republican Senator Brant McCreadie, who introduced the bill.

"It's a stern, loud-and-clear message to any offenders out there that there's going to be consequences."

But Democratic Vice Speaker Benjamin J. Cruz expressed concern that the bill could spark other legislation based on the eye-for-an-eye punishment model.

"Is there going to be a piece of legislation to cut out tongues, cut out hands?" he asked.

Nine US states -- California, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, Oregon, Texas and Wisconsin -- have versions of chemical castration in their laws, as reported by CNN.

Both California and Florida, for instance, require mandatory injections for repeat sex offenders and discretionary injections for first-time offenders, although the Florida law has only been invoked a few times since its passage in 1997.

Chemical castration, according to CNN, involves administering medication -- via injection or tablets -- to take away sexual interest and make it impossible for a person to perform sexual acts.

The effects are reversible, after the person stops taking the drug.

After high-profile child rape cases, politicians worldwide tend to pledge a crackdown and harsher punishments for sex offenders, involving chemical castration, CNN said citing Don Grubin, professor of forensic psychiatry at Newcastle University.

"In a way, I liken it to cutting the hand off the thief," he was quoted as saying. "It's very symbolic."

"It's clear the drugs work," Grubin said. "If you look at men, they do reduce sex drive drastically. They do reduce re-offending in the men."

But they also have side effects, such as osteoporosis, changes in cardiovascular health, blood fat levels, blood pressure and symptoms that mimic women's menopause.

The process of chemical castration has been used in various forms in several countries including Argentina, Australia, Estonia, Israel, Moldova, New Zealand, Poland and Russia, according to CNN.

The practice of forced chemical castration has been called "inhuman treatment" by Amnesty International.

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