

9. Cut to the Quick

The Czech Republic is the only country in Europe that offers surgical castration to violent sex offenders. In 2009, the nation came under heavy criticism for the practice when the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee named the practice of surgical castration "invasive, irreversible and mutilating." According to Dan Bilefsky, writing in the 11 March 2009 New York Times, "[o]ther critics said that castration threaten[s] to lead society down a dangerous road toward eugenics."

For some who have elected surgical castration, the procedure provides relief from worry that they might hurt someone else, and offers the chance to live a productive life. Czech doctors claim it is the most foolproof way to tame sexual urges, and discontinuing the practice puts potential victims at risk. Surgical castration takes about one hour to perform and involves removing the testes through an incision in the scrotum. Chemical castration, which is used more widely, is reversible and necessitates the continual administration of anti-androgen drugs either orally or intravenously. A specialist in sexual disorders at Johns Hopkins argues that chemical castration is superior to surgery for treating sex criminals, because continual treatment provides the opportunity for physicians to monitor compliance should it be a condition of release.

Although anecdotal, there are reports of recidivism by violent sex offenders who have been surgically or chemically castrated. Surgically castrated ex-cons can at least temporarily reverse the effect of castration by taking testosterone, which is readily available over the Internet. Yet, evidence suggests the rate is less than five percent, compared with over 80% for untreated offenders.

Surgical castration in the Czech Republic is voluntary. It could, however, be construed as coercive when it is explicitly or implicitly a condition of increased freedoms in custody or of release from incarceration.