

**Infant Oral Mutilation (IOM)** is a barbaric, culturally-rooted, belief-driven, magico-religious practice of removing an infant's unerupted teeth or tooth buds with unsterilized tools and without anesthesia.

# INFANT ORAL MUTILATION

## PROCEDURE

### Pre-mutilation

A week before carrying out IOM, mothers apply local herbs on their breast and the infant's gum pads. This is called "**silencing**." The protrusion on the gingiva associated with the developing tooth buds is identified as the oral mucosa gets desiccated by the dehydration caused due to diarrhoea.

### Mutilation

- First approach  
Lance the gums with sharp heated instrument → Continued until bleeding occurs
- Second approach  
Incise the gingiva over the primary canine bulge → Enucleate the entire tooth bud

### Post-mutilation

Additional herbs and honey are rubbed or pushed in the tooth socket to promote wound healing.

## COMPLICATIONS

### Short-term

### SYSTEMIC

Tetanus, osteomyelitis, septicaemia, upper respiratory tract infections, meningitis, otitis media, convulsions, malaria, pneumonia, gastroenteritis

### DENTOALVEOLAR

Pain, haemorrhage, trismus, submandibular abscess, tissue laceration

### Long-term

HIV/AIDS, Noma (Cancrum oris), malnutrition

Dental hypoplasia, dilaceration, ectopic eruption, midline shift, malocclusion, malformed teeth, odontoma-like structures

- Peak fatality rate: 21%
- Means hospitalization period of infant: 8.4 days
- Age group affected: 4 months – 4 years
- Done by tribal heads, family members, older women, priest, teachers.
- Most cases are performed bilaterally

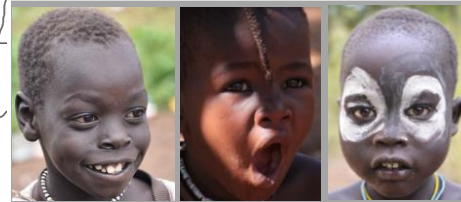
Developed countries where the practice of IOM has been reported:

- USA
- UK
- Israel
- France
- Sweden
- Norway
- New Zealand
- Australia

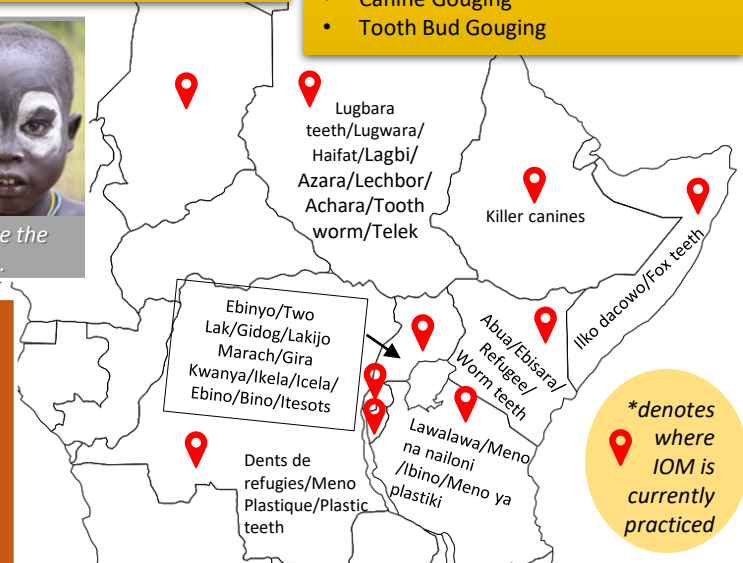
*\*Speculated prevalence in Southeast Asian countries but no data is available.*

Terminologies reported in literature referring to IOM:

- Tooth extirpation
- Germectomy
- Deciduous canine buds enucleation
- Dental transfigurement
- Dental ablation
- Vinyl teeth
- Canine Gouging
- Tooth Bud Gouging

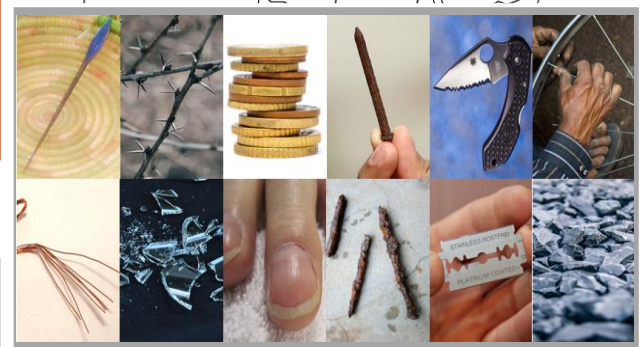


Mandibular canines and laterals are the most commonly affected teeth.



## Common beliefs behind IOM

In order to fulfil their desire of resembling an ox, some tribes believe that the absence of canines in bovine calves is why they do not suffer from diarrhoea or febrile diseases. Locked jaw is common due to tetanus in certain tribes. They believe IOM creates a space for feeding and additional airway in such cases. In some tribes, ritual extraction of permanent maxillary incisors is done to increase the force of firing poisoned darts by blowpipes.



Some commonly reported instruments used for IOM

YEAR	EVENT
5000 B.C.	Ancient Sumerian text and the Legend of Worm
400 B.C.E.	Hippocrates details the signs and symptoms of teething
1575	Ambroise Pare incises gingiva with lancet to relieve pain caused by erupting tooth
1668	Francois Mauriceau reports the use of knife and coins to incise the gingiva
1742	Joseph Hurlock encouraged the practice of incising the gingiva to prevent child deaths due to teething
1905	First reported speculations arise on whether or not IOM was introduced and brought into Africa by USA
1932	Customary removal of deciduous lower incisors and lower canine tooth buds reported in Sudanese and Uganda tribes
1960s	The ritual is introduced in Kenya from the neighbouring nations of Tanzania and Uganda
1969	Pindborg reports the superstitions associated with removal of tooth buds in infants. By now "mutilation" was commonly used to describe this practice.
21 <sup>st</sup> century	IOM persists. Extraction of permanent lower incisors for mythological reasons in some tribes to make space for wooden plugs or plates continues to be done at the age 7-8 years.

YEAR	ORGANIZATION	OBJECTIVES
2008	Dentaid	Address the detrimental effects of IOM to African immigrants in UK
2018	Call of Action	Major East African countries unite for creating awareness about the ill-effects of IOM
2019	Addis Ababa Declaration	Signed by 10 countries from East and Central Africa Aims to eradicate IOM within 10 years through law enforcement programs against IOM, educational public health campaigns, and urging the African Union to make it illegal.

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## REFERENCES

