

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND:

Fever and diarrhea are among the common morbidities that do occur during infancy and are sometimes wrongly associated with teething by the community. Some societies practice gum lancing, ordinarily referred to as gum cutting, as a remedy for the "teething diarrhoea". These myths have a potential of giving false security with the belief that these symptoms are part of the teething process, and so medical attention may not be sought when necessary. There are few studies focusing on the outcome of such practices despite their known potential dangers.

OBJECTIVE:

To describe various methods of gum lancing and clinical presentation, management and outcome of gum lancing among the Akamba people as seen in Kangundo District Hospital.

METHOD:

One hundred and fifteen infants/children who were brought to the hospital with a positive history of gum lancing.

RESULTS:

The common presenting complaints were persistent diarrhoea (74.0%), fever (44.3%), difficulty in breathing (27.8%) and refusal to feed (20.9%). 58.3% cases warranted admission and these included severe dehydration and shock (47.8%), severe and very severe pneumonia (40.3%), meningitis (26.9%) and generalized sepsis (17.9%). There were a total of 7 mortalities (6.1%), 3 on arrival and 4 within the pediatric ward. Invasive gum lancing procedures and delayed seeking of medical attention were associated with severe disease and poorer outcomes.

CONCLUSION:

The impact of gum lancing is of both a public health and economic significance. It is associated with unfavorable outcome if prompt measures are not put in place. There is need to conduct community sensitization and educate caregivers on the truths of teething and dangers of gum lancing as well as seeking health services for fever and diarrhoea. Use of broad-spectrum antibiotics and adequate rehydration are necessary in management of the victims.