

"CHOUMP" ENAMEL TATTOOS

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ABSTRACT

Identification of both living and deceased individuals may be made by recognition of physical characteristics or comparison with data from medical or dental records. Data with low frequency of occurrence are prized by identification specialists. Two cases are presented of highly individual enamel tattoos. (J Forensic Odontostomatol 2007;25:61-2)

Key words: enamel tattoo, identification, forensic odontology

INTRODUCTION

Body art or tattoos are a common practice world over, with colour pigments impregnated into soft tissue to obtain a permanent staining of the skin.¹⁻⁴ Tooth art has also been described, with pictured veneers or jewellery inserted into anterior teeth.^{5,6}

CASE HISTORY

We report a type of a tattoo on a hard tissue, tooth enamel, a practice in parts of Indian states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, locally known as "choump". In this practice tooth enamel of the labial surface of upper central incisors are engraved with circular patterns using a hand drill and are later filled with gold. Two patterns of such tattoos one (Fig 1) and three (Fig 2) circular engravings on a single tooth are documented. We have heard of other patterns being practiced, but have not been able to document them. Reasons given for these tattoos included that it was a fashion in their village to get such tattoos, some were of the belief that this will be the only gold they will carry with them after their death to their heavenly abode and some said they were used for identifying members of a given nomadic clan.

CONCLUSION

It is widely recognised that teeth displaying highly individual features are used by forensic odontologists to enable identification of individuals.^{7,8} A single feature may hold sufficient weight to allow confirmation of identity.⁹ However, for scientific verification there must be a record of that feature for comparison. Dentists must be encouraged to detail tooth modifications, including tooth art, accurately; preferably with a photographic record



Fig.1: single gold spot tattoo on each of the upper central incisors



Fig.2: three gold spot tattoo on each of the upper central incisors

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