

Illegal Dental Practice – A Global Overview

Illegal dental practice poses serious risks to **patient safety, public health, and the credibility of the dental profession.**

It exists in **both low- and high-income countries** and is often driven by limited access to affordable dental care, shortage of qualified professionals, commercialization of dental and aesthetic services, and low public awareness.

What is illegal dental practice?

Illegal dental practice refers to the provision of dental care by individuals or organizations that **do not comply with national legal requirements.**

This includes:

- Practicing without a valid dental license or registration
- Lacking recognized dental qualifications
- Operating outside the legally authorized scope of practice
- Using professional dental titles fraudulently
- Running unlicensed dental clinics or chains

Why is this a public health issue?

Illegal dental practice can lead to:

- Infections and complications
- Permanent oral or facial damage
- Use of non-sterile or non-biocompatible materials
- Financial exploitation of patients
- Lack of accountability and patient protection



Illegal dental practice across the globe: FDI survey findings

FDI World Dental Federation conducted a global survey (2024) to assess the **extent** of illegal dental practice worldwide, examine current **legal and regulatory frameworks**, evaluate the **effectiveness** of enforcement mechanisms, and identify the key **challenges and needs** faced by National Dental Associations (NDAs). The key findings are outlined below.



PARTICIPANTS:
49 NDAS



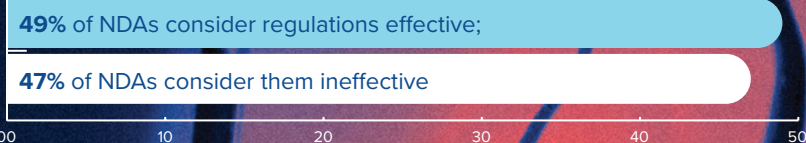
PERIOD:
JANUARY-APRIL 2024

Key findings

Laws exist, but effectiveness is mixed.

95% of countries report having laws against illegal dental practice. Definitions are usually based on **licensing, registration, and qualifications.**

Perceptions of effectiveness vary significantly:

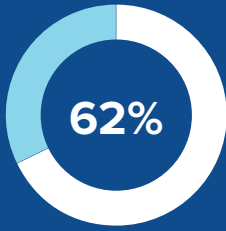


This **divergence in perceived effectiveness** reflects differences in enforcement capacity between countries, including the funding and staffing of regulatory bodies, judicial efficiency, and levels of political support.

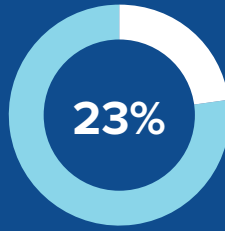
Laws alone are not sufficient without effective implementation.

Additional challenge: Strict laws may unintentionally criminalize informal or community-based care in underserved areas where access to licensed dentists is limited.

Data gaps are significant



of NDAs report no reliable data on prevalence



are uncertain

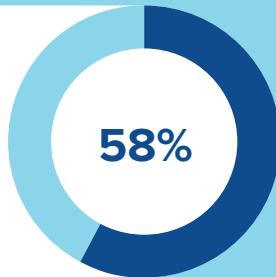


Only a few countries have partial estimates

Conclusion: Illegal dental practice is likely underreported and poorly documented, making targeted policy responses difficult.

Patient harm is real

Patient harm reported by 58% of NDAs, confirming serious health risks.



Common forms of illegal dental practices

Frequently reported activities include:

- Tooth whitening, veneers, and orthodontics by unqualified individuals
- Extractions, dentures, and implants in non-clinical settings
- Procedures offered in beauty salons, homes, or hotels
- Online sale of dental devices and remote orthodontics
- Misleading advertising on social media

The role of National Dental Associations

NDAs play a key supporting role by:

- Reporting illegal practices to authorities
- Collaborating with regulators and police (68%)
- Providing guidance and support to victims
- Conducting public awareness campaigns

Limitations: most associations lack direct enforcement authority and depend on government action.

Education and awareness strategies

Education is one of the most effective preventive tools against illegal dental practice. Common approaches reported by NDAs include:

- Social media, TV, radio, and press campaigns
- Public guidance on verifying dental licenses
- Community outreach and school programmes
- Collaboration with dental schools and ministries of health

What needs to happen - key Recommendations

To combat illegal dental practice effectively:

- Strengthen and update dental laws
- Apply meaningful penalties for offenders
- Improve data collection and monitoring
- Enable anonymous reporting (whistleblowing)
- Improve access and affordability of legal dental care
- Foster collaboration between NDAs, governments, and law enforcement

Conclusion: a systemic issue requiring coordinated action

Illegal dental practice is not only a legal issue — it reflects systemic gaps in access, regulation, enforcement, and public awareness. Protecting patients requires coordinated action across policy, enforcement, education, and health system reform.

