



D6 Improvised Weapons and Wound Patterns

Steven H. Brumm, MS, and Lorne L. Brooks*, Division of Public Safety Gulf Coast Community College, 5230 West Highway 98, Panama City, FL 32401*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how improvised weapons create unusual wound patterns.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by alerting investigators that unusual wound patterns may be caused by improvised weapons especially in a prison or jail setting.

Prison and jail populations, like all other societies today, are troubled by violent crimes. Inmates look to the correctional officers to protect them from violence but, as in cities today, the officers can't be everywhere at once and crime does occur. To protect themselves or to be able to carry out crimes of violence, inmates are very adept at improvising weapons from almost any material available to them. These weapons take many forms and tend to leave wound patterns that are different from those normally seen by investigating officers and Medical Examiners. The purpose of this presentation is to familiarize the attendee with some of the more common improvised weapons found in prisons and the wound patterns that they cause.

The one thing that inmates have is time. They have time to think of how to convert common things to weapons and they have hours to carry out their plans. An inmate who comes into possession of a suitable piece of plastic or metal thinks nothing of spending hours rubbing it against concrete to produce a sharp edge. Most weapons are defensive in nature. However, some are designed for offensive use and tend to be much stronger and often larger than defensive weapons. In general, once an inmate has made a weapon, he will conceal it in a public area so that if it is found by correctional officers, it can't be attributed to a specific inmate. However, some items can be concealed in plain view. For instance, a bar of soap in a sock makes a devastating impact weapon that can be instantly disassembled into two items the inmate is authorized to have. By the same token, a magazine rolled into a very tight cone can cause a fatal stab wound. Improvised weapons tend to fall into three major categories: impact, slicing, and stabbing. Each of these types of weapon produces a wound that is significantly different than the average knife or impact wound.

Over the years, the authors have collected a number of actual improvised weapons confiscated from inmates. There have been no modifications made to the weapons used in this presentation. The authors simply took the weapons and used them in their intended manner against a block of modeling clay. This produced patterns on and in the clay which would be very similar to wound patterns that might be observed by an investigating officer or medical examiner.

As expected, the weapons designed to slice or cut made impressions very much like a razor blade or box cutter. The impact weapons and the weapons designed to stab, however, produced impressions that were unique and unusual.

This presentation is designed to encourage investigators and medical examiners to think outside the box when they see an unusual wound pattern, particularly if the wound was produced in an area where there might be inmates or ex-inmates.

Improvised Weapons, Wound Patterns, Prisons