

H121 The Cane Sword: A Case Study

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After attending this presentation, attendees will: (1) become more familiar with a unique blade-type weapon, the “cane sword,” and the injuries associated with its use; and, (2) understand that, while it is typically impossible to determine with certainty that a particular weapon produced a specific sharp force injury, certain features of a stab wound, including its width and depth, can assist in determining whether or not a suspect blade may have produced the injury.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting a unique weapon type that may be encountered in death or crime investigations.

Despite the predominance of firearms-related deaths in the United States and in certain other locales, the most commonly used method of homicide, worldwide, is the use of sharp force.¹ Sharp force injuries are often caused by instruments that contain a blade, also called “blade-type weapons.” One of the more unique blade-type weapons is a seemingly innocuous cylindrical “cane” that releases at the handle and slides off to reveal a blade hidden within it, commonly known as a cane sword.² This type of weapon allows the user to conceal the blade inconspicuously within the body and hilt of the cane until such a time when the user decides to reveal the blade. Homicides committed using unique weapons such as the cane-sword look very similar to those committed by other blade-type weapons and can be difficult for forensic pathologists, law enforcement officers, emergency medical personnel, and physicians to identify.

This case report provides an overview of the injuries caused by a cane sword. The victim was a 27-year-old Hispanic male who was found unresponsive in an alleyway outside of his ex-girlfriend’s house. When law enforcement arrived on the scene, they found the victim with a stab wound in the left mid-back. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation was attempted, but was ultimately unsuccessful. Law enforcement officials began to question surrounding witnesses and eventually were able to obtain the weapon used in the crime: a cane sword. Upon autopsy, the stab wound was found to perforate both the lower and upper lobes of the left lung, resulting in a left hemothorax. The wound track was relatively narrow along its entire course, consistent with having been produced by the long, narrow blade of the cane sword. Additionally, the victim had other blunt force injuries to the face/head, trunk, and extremities. From these findings, the cause of death was determined to be a “stab wound to the back” and the manner of death was “homicide.”

The wounds caused by the cane sword in this case included tissue perforation, bleeding, and an eventual pneumo- and hemothorax. These findings are commonly caused by blades in general, not only the cane sword. This case emphasizes the difficulties that can exist when forensic pathologists attempt to determine the exact type of weapon involved in a stabbing injury. While “matching” a particular weapon to a specific wound is not typically possible, certain features of the wound, including items such as track width and length, can assist in determining whether or not a suspect weapon might have caused the injury. Forensic pathologists should always bear in mind the possibility of stab wounds being caused by unique and non-traditional blade-type weapons.



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Reference(s):

1. Bohnert M., Hüttemann H., Schmidt U. Homicides by sharp force. *Forensic Pathology Reviews*. 2006;4; 65-89.
 2. Sword Canes. BudK Worldwide. 2016. <http://www.budk.com/Sword-Canes-2893>. Accessed 25 March 2016.
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Cane Sword, Stab Wound, Homicide