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Death of 7-Year-Old Bronx Girl Is Linked to Abuse

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES

A 7-year-old Bronx girl died yesterday morning, shortly after police officers responding to a 911 call found her suffering from broken arms, burns, cuts and a broken jaw, the police said. Detectives were questioning the girl's mother and boyfriend last night.

The girl, Inez Bennett, was pronounced dead at Jacobi Medical Center, where she was taken after the police responded to an anonymous emergency call of a child with difficulty breathing in a third-floor apartment on Britton Street near White Plains Road in Morris Park.

The girl died of "child abuse syndrome" and had been beaten on many parts of her body and burned on her left arm, said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the medical examiner's office.

The girl's mother, Natasha Anderson, and Ms. Anderson's boyfriend, Jason Lewis, both 24, were being questioned by the authorities at the 49th Precinct station house last night.

A child is found with broken arms, burns, cuts and a broken jaw.

The police said that Mr. Lewis jumped from a window in his apartment as officers tried to take him into custody yesterday morning. He suffered a broken leg in the fall and was also taken to Jacobi before meeting with investigators yesterday afternoon, the police said.

Inez's death occurred after two other children were found to have died of child abuse in the last month.

The recent deaths have focused renewed attention on the city's Administration for Children's Services, which had been credited in recent years with effectively tackling the problem of child abuse.

While Ms. Anderson and Mr. Lewis were being questioned by detectives, officials with children's services said that Mr. Lewis's son, a 3-year-old whom the authorities did not identify, was awaiting placement in foster care.

Jennifer Falk, a spokeswoman for the administration, said that the agency had received a prior complaint against Ms. Anderson and Mr. Lewis — a lack of supervision allegation — in August 1999, but that the agency had found that the allegation had no merit. Nevertheless, Ms. Falk said, the family was referred to preventive services division because administration caseworkers found that the apartment in which the family lived was unclean.

The administration had no other records regarding the couple, Ms. Falk said. "There is no history of reports of abuse with this family," she said.

Officers who responded to the 911 call at 10:31 a.m. found Inez with notebooks that had been wrapped around her broken arms

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Medical Examiner Says Death Of Girl Caused by Child Abuse

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to serve as splints.

The police said that they had received a second 911 call that they thought was placed by Ms. Anderson in which the caller said, "My daughter's not breathing."

Neighbors in the six-story apartment building where the family lives said that they had not heard or seen anything unusual yesterday morning. But Carmen Lopez, 47, who lives across the hall from the family, said that she sometimes heard crying and screaming from the apartment — more than one would expect in a household with two children — and that there were occasions when someone inside would increase the volume on a stereo system "so you couldn't hear what was happening."

She said that, although she often lent Ms. Anderson money and shared groceries with her, the family mostly kept to itself. Ms. Lopez said that she rarely saw Inez.

Ms. Lopez, who has lived in the apartment building for 19 years, said that Inez's father died shortly after she was born and that Mr. Lewis moved into the apartment not long afterward.

Ms. Lopez said that she was heartsick when she learned that the police thought that the child's death might have been the result of abuse.

"I'm very nervous," she said. "It's a little girl."

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