

Uncle arrested in Canoga Park murders

Nearly three months after a 6-year-old girl and her 21-year-old mother were found stabbed in their Canoga Park home, the woman's uncle has been arrested on murder charges, officials said Wednesday.

Manuel Carmona, 51, was arrested Tuesday at his home in North Hills. He is scheduled to be arraigned Thursday on two counts of murder in the slayings of Martha Carmona and her daughter, Valeri Camacho.

"This was one of the most difficult crime scenes in my 20 years in the department that I've been to," L.A. police Detective Dave Peteque said at a news conference to announce the arrest.

"Any time a child is involved ... it's extremely difficult."

At the time of the killings, officials said, Carmona, the victims and five other relatives were living together in a small house in the 6900 block of Remmet Avenue.

Firefighters who responded to a call of a stabbing at the residence on May 14 found the bodies of Martha Carmona and her daughter.

Police said the crime scene and the subsequent investigation took an emotional toll on officers as well as on the victims' family. Martha Carmona's husband, her parents, her brother and a cousin also lived in the house.

"We were all shocked by the crime," LAPD Deputy Chief Kirk Albanese said.

Peteque said authorities conducted more than 100 interviews during the investigation, including with the victims' relatives. Investigators declined to discuss a motive for the killings or the weapon that was used for fear of jeopardizing their case.

"There was not one item that pointed us to Manuel," Peteque said, adding that the case was "basically a puzzle put together piece by piece, with the entire investigation leading us to Manuel."

Carmona, who moved to North Hills after the killings, is a construction worker from Mexico who has legal residency in the U.S., police said. Authorities said they considered Carmona a flight risk, and arrested him on a no-bail warrant.

Albanese praised the detective work, which, after discovery of the bodies, included officers going over the crime scene meticulously for 36 straight hours.

"They got to the truth of the matter in my judgment," Albanese said. "I believe we've got the right person."