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Man arrested in Little Armenia slaying

He is charged with killing a mother and suspected in the earlier slayings of her husband and daughter. Detectives probe whether he had stalked the woman.

By Andrew Blankstein, Los Angeles Times

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Detectives are investigating whether a man suspected in the slaying of a family in Little Armenia stalked one of the victims, according to law enforcement sources.

Alberd Tersargyan of Los Angeles has been charged with killing one member of the family, but police said they believe he's responsible for all three slayings, which occurred over two years in the Hollywood area.

LAPD Capt. Kevin McClure said detectives recovered a weapon when they arrested Tersargyan on Thursday but declined to provide further details about the case. Tersargyan was charged with the special circumstance of lying in wait, which makes him subject to the death penalty.

The slayings stunned Little Armenia, in part because the family's teenage daughter discovered the bodies of her parents and younger sister.

On Dec. 11, 2008, a gunman burst into the family's Hollywood apartment and shot father Khachik Safaryan and his 8-year-old daughter. Safaryan's 12-year-old daughter came home from school that afternoon and found the bodies.

Eighteen months later, Safaryan's widow, Karine Hakobyan, 38, was found slumped in her car with a gunshot wound to the back of the head outside her apartment. The daughter, once again, discovered the body when she became worried that her mother had not returned home from work.

Tersargyan has been charged in Hakobyan's death, but it's unclear exactly what connected him to the case.

Sources told The Times that detectives are investigating reports that he was "obsessed" with Hakobyan and had spent some time stalking her. But the sources would not say whether the family knew the man or had earlier altercations with him.

Detectives have found no evidence that the family was involved in crime in either the United States or Armenia, from which they emigrated in 2003.

Safaryan worked as a butcher in Hollywood, and his wife was a patient-care service aide at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles.

After the father and daughter were killed, detectives struggled to identify a motive or suspects.

Several months after those slayings, the daughter who discovered the bodies drafted a letter to President Obama and other leaders, including Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, asking for help in solving the case. In the letter, which she had not yet sent, she recounted how the loss changed her family.

"I am hoping that you, Mr. President, will find time to put pressure ... to solve the hideous murder of my beloved sister and father." she wrote. "I still see the bloody bodies of my sister and my father as I found them that day."

She said that Dec. 11 "was an ordinary day for a lot of people; but for us this day was special" because her younger sister was set to present a poetry reading. "My whole family was excited. Unfortunately, this day was tragic."

She also wrote about the grim toll of the killings. "Our family is falling apart now," she wrote. "My grandparents are sick and depressed. My mother cannot cope with the loss of her husband and daughter. I am not in any better shape."