

Two more men held in slayings of Burlington couple

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Two men were ordered held on \$1 million bail each yesterday after prosecutors said they had admitted taking part in the grisly slayings of a Burlington County couple.

Darryl Pierre, 19, and Clive Hinds, 18, were being held in the Camden County Jail on murder charges in the Feb. 22 slayings of Michael Hawkins and Muriah Ashley Huff, who were tortured for hours.

Pierre, of Merchantville, admitted a role in Hawkins' death, and Hinds, of Maple Shade, admitted a role in both killings, said Assistant Camden County Prosecutor Mary Alison Albright.

Also yesterday, authorities announced the arrest of a 17-year-old Pennsauken resident, charged in both killings. In all, eight people - four adults and four juveniles - have been charged. The youngest in custody is a 14-year-old girl from Camden, who is charged in Huff's killing.

Authorities say a group of people bound, gagged, beat, stabbed, and repeatedly shot Hawkins, 23. Huff, Hawkins' 18-year-old girlfriend, a cosmetology student, was beaten and strangled. A tip led Camden police to the bodies on Feb. 25; they had been buried about two days earlier in the backyard of the South Camden rowhouse where they were killed.

Hawkins and Huff were killed in a dispute between factions of the Bloods and Crips street gangs, said sources close to the investigation who asked not be named.

Detective Ron Hampton of the New Jersey State Police Intelligence Unit, who is not investigating the killings, said gang members have been as young as 8. It was unclear yesterday if the 14-year-old is a gang member, but Hampton said it would not be unusual.

"The youngest they'll start recruiting is 11 or 12 years old," Hampton said.

Hawkins, a Mount Holly resident, was a known member of the Crips, said a classmate of Huff's and law enforcement sources.

As the investigation continues, authorities have not released many more details about what took place in the rowhouse on the 500 block of Berkley Street.

Yesterday's hearing offered another glimpse into the torture. Authorities said Hawkins was killed first; Huff was then assaulted and eventually killed.

It's unclear what Hawkins was doing at the house. Camden County Prosecutor's Office spokesman Jason Laughlin said Hawkins knew Dennis Welch, 19, who lived in the home and was charged last week in connection with Hawkins' murder.

Huff, a Cinnaminson resident and Burlington County Institute of Technology senior who had been dating Hawkins for about a year, didn't know anyone in the house, Laughlin said. She appeared to be tagging along with her boyfriend.

Two witnesses told investigators they saw Hinds and others assault Huff in the Berkley Street home, police records show.

A participant said Pierre and others physically assaulted and strangled Huff. The same person also said Pierre physically assaulted Hawkins in the home until he died, records show.

Hinds' attorney, Edward J. Crisonino, said his client, a Burlington County College freshman, did not play a part in the killings.

Hinds' father and brother sat in the courtroom. His mother, a nurse, couldn't bear to come inside and sat outside during the hearing, Crisonino said.

Authorities said some of the other defendants have admitted roles in the killings.

Along with Welch, Lance Fulton, 19, of Camden, has been charged with Hawkins' murder. Authorities tracked Fulton to Whiteville, N.C., where he was arrested last week. He faces extradition to New Jersey.

Officials say Welch also took part in the effort to hide the killings, by scrubbing the walls with bleach and ripping up the blood-soaked carpets.

Two juveniles - 17-year-olds from Astoria, N.Y. and Pennsauken - also have been charged with both homicides.

Albright said the chances were "very, very high" that the juveniles will be charged as adults.

Rocco Cipparone, a defense attorney and former federal prosecutor, said an increasing number of juveniles are being charged with murder nationwide, although it is a more unusual to have a girl as young as 14 charged with murder.

"It's a little scary. It's not shocking, unfortunately, but it's hard-core," said Cipparone, who teaches criminal practice at Rutgers School of Law in Camden. "It's not as uncommon as we would hope."