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### Police: D.M. area homicides likely not related

*Rod Boshart Gazette Des Moines Bureau*

DES MOINES - State and area law enforcement officers Friday were trying to turn up leads in the separate stabbing deaths of three women and quell speculation that a slasher may be at work in a trio of attacks in the Polk County area in the past six weeks. "We have looked into that. We're open to that, but at this point, no, we don't have anything that would tie in any of the three homicides," Des Moines Police Lt. Kelly Willis said. "We have looked at that possibility but at this point there's nothing that would indicate that they are related."

Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation agents were called in to help Norwalk authorities probe the death of Arlys Ponce, a 42-year-old mother of three who died of multiple stab wounds Wednesday.

DCI spokesman John Blessman said "we're interviewing people and running out leads as they come in" but declined to specify whether investigators were zeroing in on a suspect in the homicide that occurred in the community of 6,000 people south of Des Moines.

Ponce's death was the third incident since Aug. 28 in which a woman was discovered dead of multiple stab wounds. Julie Bell Davis, 33, of Marion, was slain at an east-side Des Moines business where she worked once or twice a week and Zurijeta Sakanovic, 21, was killed Sept. 4 in a Clive hotel where she worked as a housekeeper.

Authorities have been unable to solve the two previous homicides and Wednesday's occurrence at Ponce's Norwalk home fueled speculation that the deaths might be linked. However, Willis and Blessman said the only similarity is that a knife was used as the murder weapon. Otherwise, the cases seem unrelated.

"I couldn't even comment on that. It would be complete, pure speculation," said Blessman, whose agency also is assisting Clive police in the investigation of Sakanovic's death. "The only similarity is that they died of multiple stab wounds."

Willis said police still are hoping that someone will come forward with information that would provide a break in the Davis case, but he also said that any relationship to the other unsolved murders is "pretty far-fetched."

"Obviously, we entertain every idea. At this point, there's absolutely nothing that would link them," he said.

Polk County Crime Stoppers and the Des Moines Police Department are offering a combined reward of \$6,000 in hopes of uncovering information that could help solve the Davis homicide. Authorities still have no suspect or motive in the fatal attack, Willis said.

Davis, the mother of two small children, was in the process of moving the satellite business to a new Polk County location. She was boxing up supplies in a storage area when she was attacked and murdered.

**Illustration:** COLOR PHOTO

Julie Bell Davis Marion woman 1st of 3 woman stabbed to death recently in D.M.

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