

LAPD detective commits suicide after molestation allegations, authorities say

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A detective for the Los Angeles Police Department who once investigated sexual assault cases killed himself Thanksgiving morning after two relatives accused him of sexually abusing them, authorities said Friday.

The body of Dennis Derr, 52, a 17-year LAPD veteran, was found in his car in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Palmdale, law enforcement officials said. Derr died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, according to Los Angeles County coroner's Assistant Chief Ed Winter.

Brian Hudson, a sergeant in the L.A. County Sheriff's Special Victims Bureau, confirmed two adults made sexual abuse allegations against Derr shortly before he committed suicide. Hudson declined to provide any other details about the investigation into Derr, but other sheriff's and LAPD sources with knowledge of the case said the two accusers were relatives of Derr.

Although he said the investigation was in its early stages, Hudson said that at this time there have been no other molestation allegations made against Derr.

Philip Derr, the detective's son, said in an interview that two adult men related to Derr recently confided in each other that Derr had molested them when they were teenagers. One of the relatives alleged that he had been abused repeatedly, while the other could recall one instance of abuse a few years ago, Philip Derr said.

The two relatives told Dennis Derr's wife about the alleged abuse, Philip Derr said. The wife, in turn, wrote a note to her husband as he slept, saying she was aware of the abuse claims, and then left the family's Acton house, according to Philip Derr.

The next morning, Nov. 27, Derr wrote an email to family members in which he made a vague denial of any "sexual failures" and alluded to a plan to kill himself, said Philip Derr, who received the email.

Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies went to Derr's house but did not find him, Philip Derr said. His body was discovered a few hours later in the Wal-Mart parking lot, sheriff's and coroner's officials said.

Derr, a detective since 2006, was assigned to the LAPD's Van Nuys Division and, for at least a few years, belonged to the team of investigators that handled sexual assault cases, department records show.

In July 2008, for example, he was named in a press release as the detective assigned to an investigation into a man accused of having sex with a 14-year-old girl. The following year he worked on a case of an assailant who attacked and sexually assaulted a woman as she was jogging.

"He would talk about how much he hated the people who did this sort of thing," Philip Derr said.

Derr's wife could not be reached for comment.

When he died, Derr was assigned to theft cases and had not worked sex crimes for years, an LAPD spokesman said. LAPD Cmdr. Andrew Smith said the department's internal affairs unit has launched an investigation.

Over the last decade, Derr also served as a pastor or bible study teacher at two churches, his son said.

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