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California: This just in

Man charged in killing, robbery of transgender woman and rape of 11-year-old girl

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A 30-year-old Inglewood man was charged Monday with shooting a 21-year-old transgender woman during a robbery and forcing an 11-year-old girl into prostitution, according to the Los Angeles County district attorney's office.

Robert James Spells was charged with one count of capital murder with a special circumstance of killing someone during a robbery. Spells, who is due in court Monday, was also charged with six other felonies including second-degree robbery, offering the child to men for sex and two counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child.

On Dec. 3, 2014, **Deshawnda "Ta-Ta" Sanchez** called 911 at about 4 a.m. stating she had been robbed and assaulted. While pounding on a door for help in the 6100 block of S. Wilton Place, she was shot. Police have not said what was stolen from Sanchez.

Police on Thursday identified Spells as a suspect in the killing and also connected him to the alleged sexual assault of the 11-year-old girl between Feb. 7 and Feb. 16.

DNA and residential surveillance footage helped police piece together the crimes. Spells was featured on a UCLA social justice club's blog in September 2014 and described as a man "full of compassion and charisma overall in spite of society." He credited Homeboy Industries with helping him gain stability after various stints in prison.

LAPD Det. Chris Barling told The Times last week that Spells knew Sanchez but declined to discuss further details about their relationship.

Although prosecutors did not file hate crime allegations against Spells, Barling said that Sanchez's gender identity is believed to have been a contributing factor in the attack.

Sanchez was one in a string of transgender killings in Southern California in recent months.

Spells faces life in state prison without parole if convicted.

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