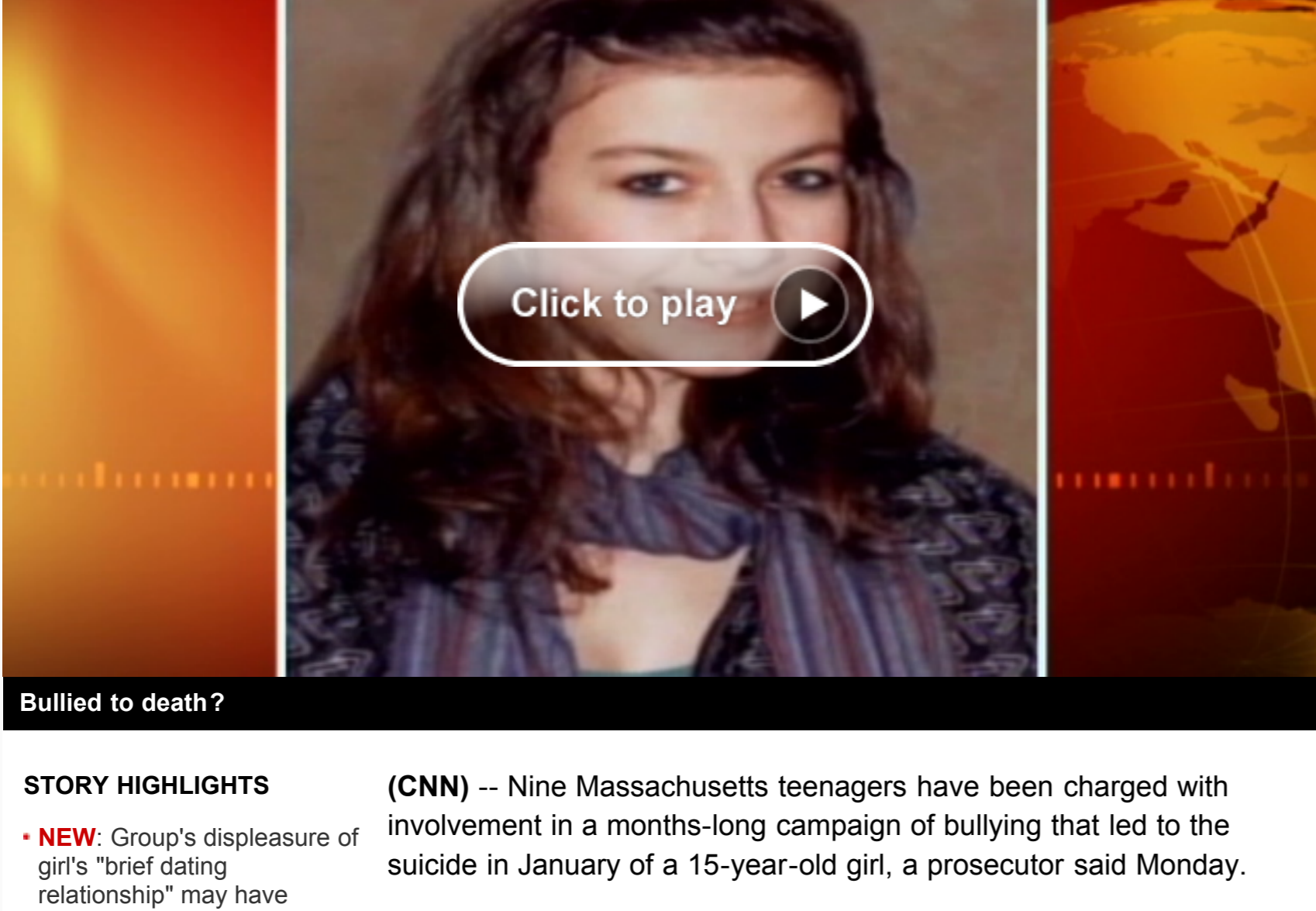


Prosecutor: 9 teens charged in bullying that led to girl's suicide

By the CNN Wire Staff

March 30, 2010 -- Updated 1353 GMT (2153 HKT)



Bullied to death?

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- NEW** Group's displeasure of girl's "brief dating relationship" may have sparked harassment
- Prosecutor: Suicide of Massachusetts girl, 15, is culmination of months of bullying
- Younger sister of Phoebe Prince found her body hanging in family's apartment building
- Victim "was subjected to verbal harassment and physical abuse," district attorney says

(CNN) -- Nine Massachusetts teenagers have been charged with involvement in a months-long campaign of bullying that led to the suicide in January of a 15-year-old girl, a prosecutor said Monday.

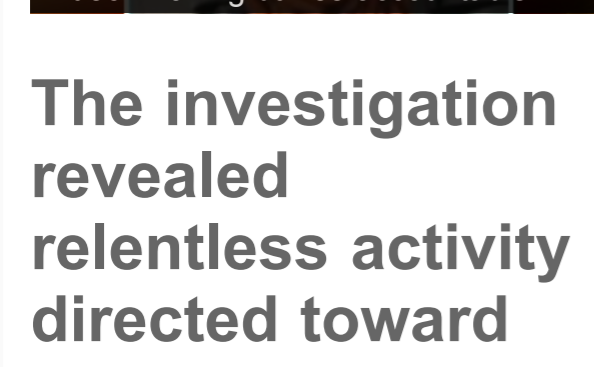
Phoebe Prince's body was found hanging in the stairway leading to her family's second-floor apartment in South Hadley, Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth D. Scheibel told reporters in the western Massachusetts town of Northampton.

"It appears that Phoebe's death on January 14 followed a torturous day for her when she was subjected to verbal harassment and physical abuse," she said.

Earlier in the day, Prince had been harassed as she studied in the library at South Hadley High School, apparently in the presence of a faculty member and several students, none of whom reported it until after the death, Scheibel said.

Prince, who had recently moved to the area with her family from Ireland, was also harassed as she walked through the halls of the school that day and as she walked on the street toward her home, Scheibel said.

The harassment that day, by one male and two females, "appears to have been motivated by the group's displeasure with Phoebe's brief dating relationship with a male student that had ended six weeks earlier," she said.



Video: Making bullies accountable

The investigation revealed relentless activity directed toward Phoebe designed to humiliate her.

--Elizabeth D. Scheibel, Northwestern district attorney

But that day's events were not isolated; they "were the culmination of a nearly three-month campaign of verbally abusive, assaultive behavior and threats of physical harm toward Phoebe on school grounds by several South Hadley students," Scheibel added.

"Their conduct far exceeded the limits of normal teenage relationship-related quarrels. The investigation revealed relentless activity directed toward Phoebe designed to humiliate her and to make it impossible for her to remain at school."

In the indictments, returned Friday but not made public until Monday, the Hampshire County grand jury charged 17-year-old Sean Mulveyhill of South Hadley with statutory rape, violation of civil rights with bodily injury resulting, criminal harassment and disturbance of a school assembly.

The indictments charged 18-year-old Austin Renaud of Springfield with statutory rape.

Kayla Narey, 17, of South Hadley, was charged with violation of civil rights with bodily injury resulting, criminal harassment and disturbance of a school assembly.

CNN was not able to reach any of the three, none of whom has been taken into custody, according to Scheibel. She did not elaborate on the statutory rape charges.

Charges against another three girls included violation of civil rights with bodily injury resulting; two were also charged with stalking.

Three other girls from South Hadley were named in four delinquency complaints from Hampshire Franklin Juvenile Court. Their charges included violation of civil rights with bodily injury resulting, criminal harassment and disturbance of a school assembly, violation of civil rights, criminal harassment and assault by means of a dangerous weapon. One of the juveniles was charged in a separate complaint involving a second victim, Scheibel said.

Though initial news reports blamed Prince's suicide on cyberbullying, Scheibel said the students' actions were "primarily conducted on school grounds during school hours and while school was in session." She said any use of electronic social networks was secondary to "commonly understood bullying methods."

The bullying of Prince was common knowledge to most of the student body and to certain faculty, staff and administrators, Scheibel said. At least four students and two faculty members had intervened during the harassment, but the school's code of conduct was inconsistently enforced, she said.

Though the faculty, staff and administrators' behavior was not deemed criminal, "the actions, or inactions, of some adults at the school are troublesome," she said.

Scheibel said the Prince family had asked "that the public refrain from vigilantism in favor of allowing the judicial system an opportunity to provide a measure of justice for Phoebe." CNN was not able to reach the Prince family.

Scheibel said the investigation was continuing and that a 10th person may be charged.

Arraignments will occur "in the near future," she said.

Several of the students remain in the school. In a statement, South Hadley Public Schools Assistant Superintendent Christine Swelok said school officials would meet with the district attorney to review any new evidence.

"Once we are able to obtain this information, we will be able to make a more comprehensive statement and possibly take further action against the students still attending South Hadley High School," she said.

The statutory rape charges could result in penalties of up to life in prison, said Elizabeth Farris, a lawyer in the prosecutor's office. A conviction on a violation-of-civil-rights charge could result in 10 years in prison; a conviction for criminal harassment up to 2 1/2 years; a conviction for disturbance of school assembly up to one month, she said.

Those 17 and older will be tried as adults in Hampshire County Superior Court. The juveniles will be tried in juvenile court. A juvenile court judge may choose to institute an adult penalty, a combination of adult and juvenile penalties or a juvenile penalty alone, Farris said.

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JamesX After Columbine High School Massacre I am surprised our schools have not taken a better approach in protecting students.

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PI314Eyes Could cyber-bullying be considered the equivalent to a global medieval stockade?

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bassoutwest You know that the parents of the indicted are defending the behavior of their children. "Who? My darling perfect boy...do such a thing...NEVER". "We don't know what could have driven him to do such a thing he was just the sweetest, most perfect boy a mother could wish for."

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homegalaxy This is nothing in comparison to bullying in military. Why no one take a look at this?

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SandyVC She was a teenager girl not an adult who signed up for it. Everyone knows there is rampant bullying in the military. There always has been. I am from a military family and this was considered good, clean fun for the boys. Men. People are looking at it. But nothing gets done, just like nothing gets done...more

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MEGAMOM37 Because right now the discussion is about Pheobes case. Military bullying has been brought up in the media as well. Both disturbing.

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crazytwo the schools need to be in charged and arrested for them not being strict from there school officials need to stand up and the parents of bullies wish to remain anonymously as there friends of the bullies stood on the hand of other and lied for them i was bullied and felt deperesed th...more

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crazytwo I was bullied at school and my parents dis regarded my statment and went to the principal many times they though since i was not hurt, i was hurt emotional they need to do something better with the bullying i was almost suspended because i was trying to stand up for myself, the bully neve...more

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rae89 Bullying has lifelong effects. In elementary school I was smaller and slower than all of the other students. In second grade I was tied to a set of bleachers with a jump rope by a classmate during lunch recess. When the bell rang for us to go inside for lunch, i was still struggling to try and get o...more

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phnxrth And what's part of the message the bullies were trying to get across to you and phoebe? That you shouldn't expect much in life. See, that's really wrong.

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SandyVC Dorothea. Thank you for believing in your children and supporting them. My mother would not because it must have been my fault. She said the teachers would be allowed to teach if they were wrong. As a bullied adult (good looking and very intelligent - I'd trade the smarts for arts any day.) peop...more

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LAMetalhead Tagabarugo, violence is the best way to combat violence. Those who turn the other cheek end up like Phoebe.

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phnxrth I've had to deal with quite a few violent people in my life. I'm one of those who has a lot of patience but a couple times my patience ran out. I regret that and wish I could've thought of a smarter way. Some people are like dealing with terrorists, though, you know? The languages they understand ar...more

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SandyVC That may well be LAMeathead. It is not, however, what most humans want. We view our cousins, the apes, we can chase to change. We have done so. Look at how we unlike girls under 18 now. 150 years ago they would be worn out from years of child bearing and housework by 18. There is no place in modern soc...more

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CapitalsFan8 "violence to fight violence" to an extent

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Guest The schools need to work hand in hand with parents, alerting them when their children are the instigators of bullying. I know there are some parents that work at teaching their children about the cruelty of bullying but when they're out of sight of their parents they go to school and turn into monste...more

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senator12 Certainly the bullies in this case should be punished for acts of intense emotional cruelty, but in a larger sense were there no bystanders to this tragedy who could have "stood" between this girl and her abusers and not just on the school's staff/faculty? There used to be a prevalent expectation an...more

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MEGAMOM37 Otalor- These kids are to blame for her suicide! Not only did they bully her relentlessly, but TWO boys RAPED her for Godsake! Obviously you have no idea what rape can do to a persons state of mind and she was raped by two individuals. Then on top of it she was harassed for months. I can see w...more

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TonyDigital I hope this wakes schools up. I know from personal experience bullying is taken lightly all the way up until one finishes high school. I pray the 9 bully's be made examples of. School bullying is incredibly damaging and painful. I am sorry the beautiful young lady felt suicide was her only resolutio...more

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otalor It's the bullies fault that the girl is dead. Then who's fault is it that the bullies bullied. What if the bullies had an excuse for why they bullied. Low self-esteem, poor upbringing, lack of self worth...etc. If the bullies have an excuse for what they did, who else is there to blame? Oh...yes,

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eao21 Schools are like little cities. We now have a variety of demographics (socio-economic and ethnic) from the surrounding communities present within almost every public school. The students attending classes in the most elite programs probably don't have any problems because they are attending...more

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Spawned To add insult to injury the parents of these punk kids will be coming up with excuses why their little demons are not at fault, and should not go to prison.

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SCBeauty1983 It's already started; see my comment a few posts down.

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jessie1475 This is so sad. she looks like a beautiful young lady and had her whole life ahead of her. what a shame, the kids these days are out of control. i hope the judge makes examples of them all. so this may stop the bully's in there tracks. when i was young i got bullied and i still remember the pain it...more

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FletchWhipp I moved from one country to another as a kid, and it's pretty easy to get singled out as being different, if just for an accent. I didn't like school for the first few months as a result, but it all changed, but 'kids' here in America in GENERAL have become to numb to any semblance of manners, and t...more

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