

Lawyer silent on sex allegations

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The lawyer of a Zimbabwean girl's family will not comment on suggestions she was sexually assaulted before her death.

Ten-year-old Charlene Makaza died in Christchurch Hospital nine days ago after she was admitted with breathing difficulties a day earlier.

Her condition was initially thought to be pneumonia, but this was ruled out by medical experts, prompting the police to start a homicide investigation.

Charlene and her 12-year-old sister were staying with their aunt and uncle and two cousins in a Bryndwr house until the death.

Charlene's sister has since been taken into Child, Youth and Family care amid reports that Charlene was sexually assaulted.

The family's lawyer, Susan Lewis, yesterday would not comment on the allegations.

Homicide investigation head Detective Inspector Malcolm Johnston was pleased the family had co-operated by talking with police, but yesterday would not comment on their accounts of events.

"We have interviewed them and they have given us their answers," he said.

"I don't want to speculate. It is early days yet and there are a lot more inquiries to go."

Johnston had earlier declined to comment on whether Charlene was sexually assaulted before her death.

"We are not going to be drawn into any injuries or other allegations until we have the final report from the pathologist," he said.

Police last week examined the family home and found no evidence an intruder had entered the property.

Johnston was mindful of the stress the police investigation had placed on Charlene's family, but said: "At the end of the day, police have a job to do and as such the investigation must be robust and thorough."