

# Charges Dropped in Gang-Rape Case

Four San Fernando Valley college students were accused of drugging a Simi Valley woman. The investigation continues.

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Despite early assertions that the case was solid, prosecutors this week dropped felony charges against four San Fernando Valley college students accused of drugging and gang-raping a former Simi Valley teen.

The decision made Tuesday by the Ventura County district attorney's office means Brian Jafari, Yan Karim, Jeffrey Pineda, all 20, and Dejon Lee, 22, will not stand trial. Each had potentially faced a sentence of 40 years in prison.

"They are so relieved that the matter is behind them," said Richard M. Sudar, Lee's attorney. "Four young men just spent a year of their lives proving their innocence."

The foursome — each of whom had been free on \$250,000 bail since the alleged Jan. 11 inci-

dent — maintained their innocence from the start, and all hired private attorneys.

"Justice was finally done," said Pineda's attorney, Leonard Levine. "The district attorney's office took the right step in dismissing this case."

Senior Deputy Dist. Atty. David M. Lehr, the case prosecutor, declined to comment on the decision, saying the case remained under investigation and charges could be refiled if new evidence is found.

After a two-day preliminary hearing in August in which the men were ordered to stand trial, Lehr said his case was strong and that he intended to try the men separately and use their statements to police against each other.

Sudar said Wednesday that he believed the case was weakened by inconsistencies in the victim's account and because the four men each took polygraph tests that showed that the alleged sex acts that occurred were consensual.

Polygraph tests are not admissible in court, but prosecutors had received the results in this case as part of the discovery process.

Lehr would not discuss the

tests but said his office does not consider them in deciding how to handle a case.

According to authorities, the alleged victim, 18, knew Pineda and previously had sex with him. On Jan. 11, she invited him to the Simi Valley home where she was renting a room.

Shortly after midnight, Pineda showed up with three friends, and the five went to the kitchen and drank rum before going to the woman's bedroom to watch a movie, according to court testimony.

The alleged victim, according to her own court statements, said that after about 20 minutes her vision became blurred and she began to feel weak.

She said that the next thing she remembered was glancing at a clock about 3:30 a.m. and realizing that two of the men were sexually assaulting her.

Defense attorneys challenged her credibility at the preliminary hearing, eliciting testimony in which she admitted locking her bedroom door after the four men went inside.

The alleged victim has since returned to her home state of Virginia. The men remain in the San Fernando Valley, where they attend school.

LOS ANGELES TIMES  
2.5.02