

8 People Found Dead in Murder-Suicide

Eight people were found dead overnight in an apparent mass murder and suicide and one person was shot and wounded in a sparsely populated area of rural southern Missouri, the Missouri State Highway Patrol said on Friday.

All eight people were believed shot by one man, who died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, according to a statement by the highway patrol. One elderly woman was found dead of what appeared to be natural causes as authorities searched homes during the investigation.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch quoted Texas County Coroner Tom Whittaker as saying the victims were three women and four men, and that the elderly woman who was found dead was the shooter's mother.

"It's heartbreaking," said Todd Haley, senior pastor at Ozark Baptist Church, located about three miles from Tyrone. "Anytime you see families that go to this level of violence, it's a shame."

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon called the shooting spree a "horrific tragedy."

The events unfolded around 10 p.m. Thursday night when the Texas County Sheriff's Department responded to a call of a disturbance involving a weapon at a residence in the unincorporated community of Tyrone. A girl called authorities, saying she had fled to a neighbor's house after hearing gunshots at the home.

Deputies found two dead in that residence. After further investigation, authorities said they found five more victims and one person who was wounded in three other homes in Tyrone.

The wounded person was taken to an area hospital.

A 36-year-old man from Tyrone, believed to be the suspect in the case, was found dead in a vehicle in nearby Shannon County. It appeared the man shot himself, the highway patrol said. He was not immediately identified.

"In our job we see a lot of bad stuff and this is bad," said Highway Patrol spokesman Jeff Kinder.

Kinder said authorities were notifying relatives of the victims. Police did not yet know how the victims were related and were seeking a motive for the killings.

Houston School District Superintendent Scott Dill said the killings shocked the small community.

"My students and my teachers are very upset. I have a lot of very upset children," Dill said. "Everybody knows everybody here. We all cry together."

The Houston School district in Texas County has about 1,100 students. Texas County has a population of roughly 24,000 people.

The killings took place in a thinly populated, rural part of the state, near the Mark Twain National Forest. The region is known to attract tourists for its hunting, camping and river rafting.

Sheila Wright, treasurer of the Wellspring Church in Houston, Missouri, about 10 miles from Tyrone, said the area is plagued with drug use, crime, divorce and other problems.

"We get a lot of people praying for changes in this county and it seems like the more we pray the more it gets stirred up and crazy again," Wright said.

Nixon said the state's Department of Mental Health was working with local officials to provide counseling for students and

other citizens if needed.

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