

# Penn State scandal should focus attention on the effects of pedophilia on victims



WHEN JERRY Sandusky, former Penn State football defensive coordinator, was charged by the state attorney general with 40 counts of sexually assaulting eight boys from 1994 to 2009, the hallowed institution of Penn State Football came crashing to the ground.

During the last week, university president Graham Spanier and Joe Paterno, the Nittany Lions' legendary head football coach, were fired. Gary Schultz, university vice president, and Tim Curley, the school's athletic director, were charged with perjury for allegedly lying to a grand jury and failure to report child sex abuse. And the university appointed a special commission to investigate who had knowledge of the sexual abuse and when.

While news media attention and public fascination have focused on

## COMMENTARY

WILLIAM C.  
KASHATUS

Paterno and the conspiracy of silence that surrounds the scandal, seemingly little consideration has been given to the alleged victims – at least eight youngsters, who ranged in age from 7 to 13 years at the time of the suspected incidents. If the charges are true, their lives have been damaged irreparably by a sexual predator.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Statistics, on any given day there are approximately 234,000 sex offenders under the custody or care of corrections agencies. The median age of their victims was younger than 13.

In addition, the National Center for Victims of Crime points out child sexual abuse is reported almost

90,000 times a year, and that 34 percent of the victims are younger than age 12. But the numbers of unreported abuse are far greater because the children typically are afraid to tell anyone what has happened, and the legal procedure for validating an episode is difficult.

As a result, most victims are left to deal with the effects of the crime on their own. And the effects can be devastating.

Sexually abused children reported cognitive, physical and behavioral symptoms, including general behavior problems, delinquency, anxiety, depression, regressive behaviors, nightmares, cruelty and self-injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, poor self-esteem and age-inappropriate sexual behavior.

In adulthood many of the victims struggle with an inability to trust others and to develop intimacy, both emotional and sexual, with those closest to them. Still others wage an ongoing battle with drug and alcohol

**What makes the Sandusky case so troubling is that he was a teacher-coach, entrusted with the moral welfare of young people. If found guilty, he's not only destroyed all the good he achieved as a college coach and founder of the Second Mile Children's Charity, but also he has damaged the credibility of other teacher-coaches ...**

abuse, suicidal tendencies and borderline personality disorder.

Pedophilia is among the most heinous crimes because the victims are haunted by it for the rest of their lives.

Considering these circumstances, Paterno's firing is not nearly as important as preventing sexual abuse that robs victims of their psychological and emotional health and the ability to lead a normal life in the future.

What makes the Sandusky case so troubling is that he was a teacher-coach, entrusted with the moral welfare of young people. If found guilty, he's not only destroyed all the good he achieved as a college coach and founder of the Second Mile children's charity, but also he has damaged the credibility of other teacher-coaches who genuinely care about young people and act on that concern with a high sense of moral integrity.

If nothing else, the Penn State scandal hopefully will shed greater light on the effects of child sex abuse and help to bring the predators to justice before they can destroy another life.

**William C. Kashatus**, of Hunlock Creek, is an educator and writer. He can be contacted at [bill@historylive.net](mailto:bill@historylive.net). For information on treating child sex abuse victims, see Child Welfare Information Gateway at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/sexabuse/sexabusef.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/sexabuse/sexabusef.cfm)

THE TIMES LEADER

PAGE 4E SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2011