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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Advocate Rates Sandusky Media Coverage a "C"**

*Broader perspective, more precise language, but missed opportunity to focus on prevention*

**NEW YORK—Jan. 9, 2012**—A new report today praised early media coverage of the Penn State University child sexual abuse crisis for its broader perspective and precise language but criticized its failure to address solutions for prevention.

The report, released by the Ms. Foundation for Women and the Berkeley Media Studies Group, recognized the media for its ability to tell an institutional story about university officials' failure to report and end abuse after they learned of it. However, the coverage fell short in examining what preliminary measures should have been taken to prevent the abuse from occurring and what steps are being taken now to prevent future abuse.

"The domino effect of the allegations triggered by the initial coverage of Penn State underscores the prevalence of child sexual abuse in our culture and demands discussion of solutions," said Ms. Foundation for Women President and CEO Anika Rahman. "The Penn State coverage deserves only a 'C' for its inadequacy in painting a fuller picture that includes addressing the cultural conditions that perpetuate abuse.

"Media coverage increases the visibility of societal problems and fuels our nation's collective response. Coverage that is absent of solutions denies us an opportunity to prevent child sexual abuse for the one in four girls and one in six boys who are sexually abused each year," said Rahman.

The report, "Breaking News on Child Sexual Abuse: Early Coverage of Penn State," found that less than one-third of the general news coverage of the Jerry Sandusky case included a mention of a potential solution or policy measure to reduce or prevent future abuse. Among sports coverage of the Sandusky case, merely 5 percent highlighted prevention efforts. The exclusion of solutions in this case is consistent with the findings of an earlier BMSG study on news coverage of child sexual abuse.

Among the articles mentioning solutions, the most frequently cited ones focused on actions after the abuse had been committed, such as reporting abuse, rather than measures intended to prevent abuse from occurring.

"The report highlights that prevention continues to get short shrift in news coverage of child sexual abuse," BMSG Director Lori Dorfman said. "Journalists and advocates can work together on stories like this to help the public and policymakers understand the need for prevention policies."

On a positive note, the report's authors saw significant progress in the language used to describe acts of abuse. It was more precise and descriptive compared to a previous study that BMSG released last June. Very few articles used terms that were vague or minimized the alleged actions, such as "horseplay."

"We found that the coverage of Penn State included more precise descriptions of Sandusky's alleged actions than is usual, possibly because reporters had access to the highly specific language in the grand jury

testimony,” said study co-author Pamela Mejia. “This increased precision in language is an important step in improving the coverage of child sexual abuse, but there is still room for improvement if reporters are to sensitively but accurately convey to readers the true scope of what the survivors experienced.”

Among the other findings was the fact that less than one-fifth of the news coverage included in the study detailed the impact of the abuse on the survivors. In contrast, news coverage extensively explored the consequences faced by university and team officials and students.

“Responsible journalism dictates that reporters present perspectives from survivors, child sexual abuse prevention advocates and other authorities,” Rahman said. “The true nature of the abuse is obscured without the voices of those who are most impacted.”

The study examined 155 pieces from nine days of news coverage and commentary beginning on the day of Sandusky’s arrest. It includes recommendations for journalists on ways to improve coverage of child sexual abuse as well as recommendations for advocates to help push for policies that will institute prevention.

Copies of the full report are available at <http://ms.foundation.org/> and <http://www.bmsg.org/>.

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#### ***About the Ms. Foundation for Women***

*The Ms. Foundation for Women is the leading national social justice foundation committed to building women’s power to ignite change. Every day, it helps over 150 grassroots organizations across the US fight for changes like good paying jobs, reproductive health, ending violence against women and girls, and the inclusion of women at decision-making tables. By investing in social justice trailblazers—especially women from low-income communities and communities of color most affected by injustice—it works for a nation in which power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, or any other factor. The Ms. Foundation delivers funding, builds skills, develops leaders, connects activists with allies, and amplifies the voices of our grantees to create change that benefits women, families and communities. Since 1973, the Ms. Foundation has invested nearly \$60 million in thousands of organizations and influenced other funders to support solutions from the ground up.*

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#### ***About Berkeley Media Studies Group***

*Berkeley Media Studies Group researches the way public health issues are characterized in the media and helps community groups, journalists and advocates use the media to advance healthy public policy. BMSG is a project of the Public Health Institute.*