

Ex-cop who solicited teens online sentenced in Minnesota grandforksherald.com

ANOKA, Minn. -- One previously sociable girl now keeps herself confined to her room. Another has been hospitalized four times for mental health struggles. A third said she's lost trust in just about everyone she knows.

Those are just a few of the ways life has changed for the girls a former Minneapolis police officer solicited for sex online, according to victim impact statements read during Bradley Schnickel's sentencing hearing Monday in Anoka County District Court.

One girl's parents wrote that their 13-year-old daughter was pursued for more than a year by Schnickel, who repeatedly pressured her to send nude pictures and to meet him in person.

When Schnickel was caught and eventually charged with crimes involving more than a dozen underage girls in February 2013, the parents wrote that the girl blamed herself.

"She was so ashamed. ... She was afraid she had disappointed us," the statement read. "It broke our hearts."

After hearing from the victims, as well as emotional statements by Schnickel, 33, and his wife about his remorse and ongoing rehabilitation efforts, District Judge James Cunningham sentenced the father of two to 30 months in prison.

After accounting for time already served and other factors, Schnickel will end up spending a little more than a year in prison for three counts of criminal sexual conduct and two counts of electronic solicitation of a minor, to which he pleaded guilty earlier this year.

He also was sentenced to lifetime conditional release once he leaves prison.

The sentence was significantly less than the nearly 12 years that Assistant Anoka County Attorney Paul Young argued was warranted for a man he described in court as a "person who attacks and preys on the vulnerable."

He added that the judge's decision was "frustrating" for the families involved, many of whom attended the hearing Monday.

"Given that drunk driving ... or nearly any other type of case with a single victim seems to get greater sentences ... it's tough (for them) to understand how you could have so many victims and such a light sentence here," Young said.

Fred Bruno, Schnickel's attorney, said the sentence seemed "about right," given his client's commitment to treatment and the support of his family.

"It's not a pleasant place for a young male cop sex offender to be spending his time," Bruno said.

"Followed up by a lifetime of conditional release ... that's not a light sentence."

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Schnickel enrolled in an intensive inpatient sex offender treatment facility shortly after his arrest. On Monday, his therapist told the court about Schnickel's success in the program.

For three years before he got caught, Schnickel had been leading a double life.

During the day, he worked as a patrol officer on the Minneapolis police force. At night, when he returned to his family's Andover home, he became a sexual predator.

Pretending to be a bartender or a security guard in his early 20s, he reached out to countless girls in their early teens on Facebook and developed online relationships with many.

In some cases, he sent the girls lewd pictures of himself and described what he wanted to do with them sexually.

On two occasions, he met girls in person and had sex with them in his car, one time after providing vodka.

A search of his computer uncovered more than 9,000 pages of communication between Schnickel and underage girls. He had more than 700 middle and high school girls listed as contacts on his Facebook page.

Hired as a Minneapolis police officer in 2008, he was fired shortly after the allegations against him surfaced.

Schnickel said in court Monday he was "disgusted at who (he) was" and apologized for his actions.

He called getting caught a "blessing."

"I have deep remorse," Schnickel said. "I live daily with the guilt and pain I caused so many people."

Both he and his wife, Jenny, said he has become a better person through treatment. The couple have two daughters younger than age 4.

"I 100 percent believe he is a changed man and this won't happen again," Jenny Schnickel said in court. "I have a much better husband now and my girls have a much better father."

Young said the court should be skeptical about statements made by a man whose past behavior indicates a "tremendous" ability to deceive.

He added that Schnickel solicited a prostitute after his arrest and attempted to contact victims to persuade them to lie to police about their interactions.

Schnickel was taken into custody immediately after the hearing.

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