



KMPH Special Report: Secret Scars

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Young people are using knives to slash their arms, nails to cut their legs and they're posting it all on YouTube. In a KMPH special report Norma Yuriar uncovers this disturbing Internet sensation and reveals the signs every parent should look for.

By Norma Yuriar

Fresno, Calif. (KMPH News) – Robin Beuerlein may look like your average twenty something. But, underneath her long sleeves lurk secret scars she got from 14 years of cutting.

"I was exhausted," Robin said. "Living a life as a secret cutter is time consuming. It takes up your whole day. Everywhere you go, you are thinking of how to cover up your scars. Did someone just see that? Are they talking about you behind your back?"

But these days, cutters and other self-injurers aren't afraid to show off their wounds, creating videos and posting them on YouTube.

"The videos on YouTube not only contain images of self injury, but actual footages of people committing the act," Michelle Seliner with S.A.F.E. Alternatives said. "There are graphic details of blood and implements or tools that they use to self injure as well as open wounds."

A recent study published in the journal pediatrics found more than 5,000 videos detailing self-injury on YouTube...with millions of views.

The videos ranged from live enactments, to graphic photos, and even how-to's.

According to researchers, most videos glamorized self-injury and few discouraged it.

Michelle Seliner, from the self-injury help group known as S.A.F.E. Alternatives, says she's concerned about self-injury going prime time.

"They endorse the behavior, they normalize the behavior. And for those who aren't self injuring, it gives them the idea and the notion that this is an okay thing to do," Seliner said.

And, she says, the videos can be even more harmful for those already struggling with self-injuring impulses.

"They're a tremendous trigger and actually increase their impulses to want to engage in the behavior further," Seliner said. "And may give them new ways and methods of injuring."

This new trend also worries Internet safety advocate Parry Aftab. The spokesperson with www.wiredsafety.org says she's concerned that vulnerable kids looking for answers will get a dangerous message.

"As they're looking for solutions, they go to the Internet the same way they do for anything else. And there they find the solution for their stress, for their pain, their confusion, is cutting into their wrists," Aftab said.

YouTube does have guidelines against posting videos of people being physically hurt but doesn't screen every upload.

Parry says she hopes YouTube would put a system in place where certain search terms, such as "cutting" – would pop up links to professional advice.

"What we need to do is make sure that when kids are looking for videos for

cutting and self-harm that they will go to the videos that are produced by the help groups," Aftab said. "Those will be promoted on top of the rest. They're already doing this on suicide; they're doing it on a lot of other issues."

As for Robin, she wishes she could reach out to those watching the videos and tell them they can find help if they want it.

"I want them to know, there is a life after cutting and it is the most amazing thing ever," Robin said.

Safe Alternatives says they are taking an active stance against the YouTube videos. They are producing their own videos – that will offer self-injurers a message of hope instead.

For more information on how to get help for self injury, see www.selfinjury.com or www.self-injury.net.



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