

Self-Injury Among Teens On The Rise

'Cutters' Say Mutilations Help Ease Their Internal Pain

A Note From Pastor Kevin Follows This Article.

Joelle Babula
The Arizona Republic
April 26, 2004 - 12:00 AM

Elizabeth carves into her flesh with knives when she's upset. She uses a box cutter to hack out profane words on her legs, or she sneaks a kitchen knife to slice her arms repeatedly. Sometimes, the Glendale teenager heats up an iron just to sear her skin.

The 14-year-old (*The Arizona Republic* is withholding her identity) says the acts of cutting or burning her skin relieve tension and anxiety, especially after fighting with her parents or getting dumped by a boyfriend. She says the burns and cuts temporarily distract her from her problems and make her feel better.

An increasing number of girls are cutting, burning or bruising their bodies to help cope with stress, Valley school nurses, counselors and doctors say, sparking a flurry of training sessions for guidance counselors and referrals to therapists.

"The increases everywhere are alarming. It has caught our attention to the point that we're now training all of our counselors," said David Shuff, director of guidance and counseling for Mesa Public Schools. "This is the first year we've done this kind of (self-injury) training."

There are no national or local statistics on the number of teenagers who self-injure. Health professionals and school personnel nationwide, however, say they are dealing with a steadily increasing number of teenagers, mostly girls, who hurt themselves.

A Chicago-based self-injury treatment program called S.A.F.E. has seen inquiries rise from a few hundred a month to thousands, co-founder Karen Conterio said. She said the increase had been steady over the past few years, but has spiked during the six months of this school year.

Health professionals say that without intervention, the behaviors can escalate to more dangerous acts, such as carving deeper cuts with jagged instruments, breaking bones or purposely infecting open wounds with bacteria and filth. "We've had people who have cut off a digit or those who

inject themselves with HIV, urine, feces or other substances," Conterio said. "Usually people start with a more common form of self-injury, like cutting, but it can progress."

Elizabeth first began hurting herself in December by using a curling iron to burn her skin. She progressed to irons and now she mostly uses knives or box cutters to cut her flesh. Sometimes she carves words like, "(expletive) the world," on her lower leg. Or she cuts a boy's name into her skin, which she later crosses out with further slashes when the relationship turns sour. "I have 32 scars on my arms and legs," Elizabeth said quietly. "I don't want to do this anymore, but it takes the pain away. If I didn't cut myself, I'd cry, and that would be the worst thing." Elizabeth, a freshman at Sandra Day O'Connor High School, says she has a few friends who cut themselves as well. She says they all do it privately and usually at home. "I always take a shower after I cut myself because they bleed a lot," Elizabeth said. "Then I wear pants the next day to hide it."

Experts say the reasons people self-injure are varied and sometimes complicated. Often those who hurt themselves suffer from an underlying psychiatric disorder, such as depression. Some were victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, while others feel alone or neglected or simply don't know how to communicate properly or deal with anxiety in a healthy way.

Many say the rise in self-injury is due in part to the changing family dynamic. Kids today are often forced to deal with divorced parents, Mom or Dad's new companion, working parents or substance abuse in the home. Young girls especially are often also faced with increasing pressure to be slim, sexy and attractive. "There's a real sense these kids have that they have disappointed everybody, that they are not good enough and that nobody loves them or really cares," said Andrew Levander, director of a self-injury treatment program at Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services in Los Angeles. He said self-injury is the "fastest growing adolescent behavior problem of our time." According to Levander, between 60 and 70 percent of kids who self-injure were abused in some way. Those who weren't abused, he said, sometimes hurt themselves to deal with increasing strife in the home. "These kids are looking to relieve that stress but for some reason, they can't do it verbally," Levander said. "Kids who use razors seem to be depressed and unable to cope, while kids who use glass or burn themselves tend to be aggressive and angry and turn all that anger into themselves."

Experts say it's important to remember that kids who self-injure generally are not trying to commit suicide; they simply want to feel better and don't know how to cope. "It's a red flag that the kid is hurting and is unhappy with some aspect of their life. They are in emotional pain," said Dr. Richard Spiegel, past president of the Arizona Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. "Kids tell me they are hurting because their parents are too demanding or because other kids don't like them or that they are ugly and hate themselves."

Elizabeth says she has a good relationship with her parents but she's suffered from mental problems for several years. The teenager takes medication to combat depression and she's been hospitalized for an eating disorder. "I don't know why I do it (cut), but I can't cry. I hate crying, and this seems like a good way to make me feel better," she said. "Once I'm done cutting, it hurts so bad that I can't feel the pain inside me anymore." Elizabeth's parents, Mike and Jenny, say they don't know why their daughter refuses to cry or communicate her pain. They have her in therapy and are trying to teach her better communication skills at home. "Certainly tears are allowed in this house, they always have been," Mike said. "I think she has real issues of self-acceptance and weight issues, which, unfortunately, she probably learned from me." Mike said he worries that Elizabeth's cutting will escalate to more dangerous acts, or that she'll accidentally cut herself too deep and slice an artery. "As a parent, you're bewildered by this and frightened because you just don't know where it will lead," he said. "They aren't deep cuts now, but you certainly just can't blow this off and ignore it and hope it will go away."

Psychiatrists and therapists say the earlier kids are identified and receive treatment, the better chance they will have of getting well. Treatment can include antidepressants, therapy, behavioral modification and, in some cases, inpatient treatment programs.

"I really want to stop," Elizabeth said. "Most of us do. My best friend cuts, too, and we made a pact. We have to run five miles for each slit we do." Elizabeth pleads with other teens to stay away from self-injury. "Please, don't do it," she said. "Get help. Otherwise, you get into this horrible cycle that you can't get out of."

Note from Pastor Kevin:

It is clear that the author of this article is not looking at this subject from a spiritual perspective, thus preventing the reader from understanding the why's and how's of this incredible plague that is coming to our land.

What is it that has changed in America to the point where our youth want to bring this self-destruction upon themselves? It cannot be economic hardship; since the depression era of the 20's and 30's was more severe than anything we are experiencing today. It can't be the war in Iraq, World War II and Vietnam were much more traumatic on families and our society. Is it that people are turning away from God and His laws, the disintegration of the family and the embracing of occultic powers by families across the nation? I think so.

Months ago I warned our congregation that there would be a terrible price to pay as millions of American children embraced the newest Harry Potter book, and the associated movies, action figures, and all the copy-cat cartoons, Wicca craze, etc. The author of the Harry Potter series has admitted that her books are getting "darker" and

that she personally embraces the occultic philosophy they espouse.

Many parents have naively allowed their children to take part in these books, movies, clubs, etc. thinking they are harmless and that they are just another one of those "things kids are into." They do not realize that there are real powers of darkness involved with occultic practices. The prince of darkness, Satan, heads these powers.

John 3:19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (NKJ)

*Acts 26:17 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 **'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'** (NKJ)*

Eph 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. (NKJ)

*Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, **against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.** (NKJ)*

Satan is at war with God. His war is against God's creation, especially human beings. He is a liar and has been from the beginning (John 8). God created the human body to be a tent for the soul. Originally, this human tent was made to live forever so that the soul of man would have fellowship with God in a mutual relationship of love, for eternity. But man rebelled against God and fell into sin and separation from God, and death has been reigning ever since.

God provided a way to reestablish the relationship by offering His Son, Jesus on the Cross, as a sacrifice for our sin. Satan has been, and is doing everything he can to deceive people away from this salvation plan. In every way possible he causes humans to continue

in their rebellion against God. Satan's deceptions achieve final victory when the human body dies before the soul makes a decision to become humble and repentant before God, and accepting Jesus as their Savior. Therefore, it is Satan's desire to lead people into destructive behaviors, so that they will die as early as possible. To the extent a people embrace the laws of God, there comes with it a protecting from the Lord, to shield a nation and its people from the murderous desires of Satan. If a people remove the laws of God from the land and ask God to leave them alone, then He withdraws Himself and His light; as a result the nation goes toward darkness.

Ps 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."

As this article points out, people all over this country are knowingly injecting themselves with HIV and other destructive substances. I have read other articles describing how homosexuals who have not yet contracted HIV are advertising on the NET asking for a partner with AIDS so they too can become infected. These actions defy human logic! How could people knowingly and deliberately bring such long term and terminal suffering upon themselves? This problem has not arisen because there is a shortage of psychologists and mind control drugs, as this article presumes. Instead, this collapse in our society is a direct result of people turning away from the God of the Bible (who loves them) and turning toward the enemy of their souls, Satan.

Once infected with HIV, the tent will soon die and the soul will no longer be on this world to glorify God. Even if the person repents and turns to Jesus as their Savior, their life of being a witness for Him will be shortened, and even in this Satan wins a partial victory.

Deut 14:1 "You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.

I pray that the families of this church, and those who read this article, will consider the forces involved with this curse coming to our country. If you or members of your family have or are embracing the things of the occultic world and the lies of Satan, then repent and get them out of your house and life. Get rid of all books, videos, TV shows etc. that embrace or glorify the lies that are against the laws of God. As a family, sit down and pray together asking God to cleanse you of the sins you have committed in this area. Take time

as a family to fill your minds with the power of God's Word so that you can discern and resist the attacks of the devil, Satan.

If you don't do these things, then the enemy of your soul will continue to deceive you or your children into a path that leads to darkness.

Eph 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-- (NKJ)