



A scene from the cult show *13 Reasons Why*. The show focuses on a high school pupil who addresses cassette recordings to the people she believes were instrumental to her decision to take her own life

BETH DUBBER/NETFLIX

# Netflix urged to axe teen suicide drama over copycat fears

By Sarah Knapton SCIENCE EDITOR

THE cult Netflix teen drama *13 Reasons Why* could be driving young people to consider suicide and should be withdrawn until it is made safer, experts have warned.

The series, adapted from a 2007 novel by Jay Asher, tells the story of 17-year-old Hannah Baker, a high school pupil who commits suicide.

In lieu of a suicide note, Baker leaves 13 cassette tapes, each addressed to a different person whom Hannah felt was instrumental in leading her to the point where she took her own life.

It has already been criticised by the Samaritans while authorities in New Zealand are so concerned they have banned teenagers from watching it alone. Two teenagers in Austria are believed to have attempted to kill themselves after watching the series.

Now new research by San Diego State University has found that in the days after the series first aired in March this year, Google search queries for "how to commit suicide" rocketed.

In the 19 days following the release, the number of searches including the term "suicide" jumped by 19 per cent, totalling 1.5 million queries.

Although the authors said they could not be sure whether a search preceded a suicide attempt, they warned that such search terms do correlate with actual suicides. Dr John Ayres, from

the university, said: "Our results back up the worst fears of the show's critics.

"The show may have inspired many to act on their suicidal thoughts by seeking out information on how to commit suicide.

"We are calling on Netflix to remove the show and edit its content to align with World Health Organisation standards before reposting.

"Moreover, the planned second season, and all suicide-related media, might undergo testing before wide release to prevent well-intended content from producing unintended results."

Mental health charities have frequently asked the media to avoid publicising the details of suicides to avoid copycat attempts. In the UK, the regulator Ofcom states that "methods of suicide and self-harm must not be included in programmes except where they are editorially justified and are also justified by the context".

For the new study the team focused on searches originating between March 31 2017, the series' release date, and April 18, a date selected because the suicide of Aaron Hernandez, the former NFL player, might have contaminated the trends.

Netflix said the programme had opened up a dialogue among parents, teenagers, schools and mental health advocates.

The research was published in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*.