Each of us
is part of the solution
Let's end mental health stigma together

M·H·E Mental Health Europe

"I first got a Facebook account when I was 10 years old, I remember being so excited about this amazing new online world I had joined, without realising the dangers that come with it. At first I mainly used it to play games, but then I realised I didn't have as many friends as everyone else, I didn't have as many likes as everyone else, I didn't have as many comments as everyone else.

I tried to make myself seem more popular, I ended up making fake accounts to make my friends list bigger, which seemed to impress other people, but it just made me feel alone. I was always picked on at school, I was called ugly, fat, disgusting, freak. And when I got a Facebook account, the bullying started following me home. The abuse was inside my home, it was in my room, and it was on my screen. There was no where I could hide.

I was too embarrassed to tell my parents, because I didn't want them to take my account away, because I thought I would be lonely without it. Even though the comments I got were degrading, I allowed it because I thought it was better than no comments at all. When I was 14 I experienced a traumatic event, which led me to go on a downwards spiral, and I started to self-harm, hear voices, and attempt to take my own life. I had to be in hospital and miss school sometimes, which led to my peers speculating as to why I wasn't in class.

Mental illness is incredibly isolating, but social media made it worse. People were spreading rumours online, and saying I was a psycho, a freak and dangerous, and the worst thing is that I started to believe it. For some reason there was always people that made it their personal mission to make me hate myself. But soon enough I had 27 comments.

I was happy to think people cared, but when I looked, my Facebook was full of comments calling me fat, disgusting, obese, and ugly. I took the picture down straight away. I could stand here and tell you about every time I've been degraded online, but it would take me forever. For the majority of my life, people used social media as a weapon to destroy my confidence, and for a long time it worked.

There was a time when it so bad, I called the police. But because they were using a nickname and not my actual name, there was nothing the police could do.

People can hide behind a fake name, and destroy someone's life, and there are rarely any consequences for them. The sad thing is that it's not just me who has been affected by cyber bullying. There are millions of people across the world being affected right now. In modern society we expect our friends and family to have social media accounts, because to be honest people think it's weird if they don't.

There are many good things about social media, it helps us to be connected and it can be a distraction, but we are living in a world where we check our phones before we check our fire alarms. We post selfies but we don't like ourselves. We have hundreds of friends on Facebook but only trust 3 of them. I believe that social media is both a blessing and a curse. As a society we need to make sure that we are aware of how much time we spend on it, what we are posting, and the effect it has on those around us. Social media is a great thing, but only when it is used in the right way.

Online we can construct happiness,
To hide the reality of our loneliness,
We use likes and followers to determine our self-worth,
Without realising we've been beautiful since birth,
We stare at our screens feeling alone,
But there are people around us if we look up from our phones,
You're ugly and fat, she gets comments all day,
Yet no one gets consequences for anything they say,
There's a world full of beauty,
That nobody sees,
Because we are all too scared to look up from our screens,
Millions of people get bullied online,
Were all responsible for ending this on time,
Before even one more person takes their own life."

Nikki, 19, United Kingdom

This story was originally shared at MHE's event for World Mental Health Day, and published in the Huffington Post.