

The logo features the word "RIPE" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. To its right are two vertical teal bars of different heights. Below the text are two horizontal white bars of different lengths, creating a stylized cross-like graphic.

RIPE

The resilience of the human network in the RIPE community

Presentation from a small (adhoc) group in the RIPE community
about mental health in the community



Goal

- Open the discussion about the impact of mental health for the community members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Investigate / query how people are dealing with mental health in the COVID-19 era
- See if we can assist in providing a place to communicate/ provide a platform of like minded people
- Learn, and support each other and make sure that we are not losing anyone or leaving anyone behind

How did this all start

- In 2019, #NLNOG put the topic of burnout and working in a toxic environment on the presentation agenda
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7arelnUXbyo> - Erik Bais
- The topic at the time was still quite taboo, even in the Netherlands. It created a lot of discussion and a much more open environment where people could discuss it amongst each other

Who / Why

- Beginning 2021, the small group of RIPE community members discussed the topic
- Present: Mirjam Kühne, Eileen Gallagher (INEX), Alastair Strachan, Vesna Manojlovic, Ulka Athale, Karla Liddle-White, myself (A2B Internet) & other RIPE NCC staff
- Later joined by Carolien Vos (RIPE NCC HR Director)
- Discuss if the topic would resonate within the community and if the topic should/must be discussed as it looked to be required



What was already going on ...

- Within the community, to the people that we reached out to, there was the ‘feeling’ that it would resonate ..
- Little to nothing was done within local NOGs or IXP communities, with some exceptions.
- Example:
 - The Dutch NLNOG is doing a daily ‘open for all’ - informal coffee breaks on Jitsi:
 - (<https://nlnog.net/nlnog-coffee-break/>)

Things scheduled and done

- We decided on how we wanted to approach this.
- A questionnaire was created and sent out to the RIPE community in April 2021
- Discuss the topic using a plenary slot at the RIPE 82 meeting. As it is ‘semi’ anonymous
 - It doesn’t require additional registration and people could use the ‘excuse’ to join, under the “it is a RIPE meeting presentation”
- After the RIPE 82 meeting, we plan an open-house meet up

- <https://trac.ietf.org/trac/ietf/meeting/wiki/110sidemeetings/ripe-health>



Various blogs posted on RIPE Labs and LinkedIn

- Vesna Manojlovic

- <https://labs.ripe.net/author/becha/ripe-community-resilience-network-and-belonging/>
- <https://labs.ripe.net/author/becha/ripe-community-resilience-embracing-neurodiversity/>

- Carolien Vos

- https://labs.ripe.net/author/carolien_vos/hr-from-home-adapting-in-a-year-of-covid/

Presentations in the community

- INEX:
 - Dr Tim Green (Clinical Psychologist) presented at INEX:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtjCiNSINFg>
 - Apr 28, 2020

So why the questionnaire?

- Open the thought process about the topic:
 - Mental health in the community
 - Think about work / home balance
 - Get some insight in time spent when people are not working ...
 - Open people's eyes on the relationship between (work related) stress and the physical impact

Example questions in the questionnaire

18. Do you have health issues that could relate back to stress related causes?

(You can select more than one answer)

- ☐ Stomach issues
- ☐ Heart disease
- ☐ High cholesterol
- ☐ Migraines
- ☐ Lack of (sex) drive
- ☐ Problems sleeping
- ☐ Lack of energy (Feeling tired all the time, even if you just woke up)
- ☐ Back pain
- ☐ Poor physical condition due to not enough exercise
- ☐ Over-eating
- ☐ Over-consumption of alcohol or other substances
- ☐ Lack of concentration resulting in understanding when you read long texts or do simple math
- ☐ Not applicable

Example questions in the questionnaire

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Stomach issues	14.29%
Heart disease	2.86%
High cholesterol	8.57%
Migraines	8.57%
Lack of (sex) drive	10.00%
Problems sleeping	28.57%
Lack of energy (Feeling tired all the time, even if you just woke up)	42.86%
Back pain	17.14%
Poor physical condition due to not enough exercise	22.86%
Over-eating	22.86%
Over-consumption of alcohol or other substances	10.00%
Lack of concentration resulting in understanding when you read long texts or do simple math	21.43%
Not applicable	28.57%

Example questions in the questionnaire

19. My personal situation is causing a lot of stress:

(You can select more than one answer)

- ☐ Current relationship or lack of it
- ☐ General health or mental health
- ☐ Situation at home with children / partner / parents / close friends
- ☐ Expectations from family
- ☐ Mourning loss of family / friends in the past year
- ☐ Due to the work that I'm doing and not feeling supported
- ☐ Due to my sexual orientation/gender identity I'm not feeling heard, understood or supported
- ☐ Not applicable



Example questions in the questionnaire

21. In your country or culture are mental health issues discussed openly or is there a social expectation that prevents them being discussed?

- ☐ This is not a taboo topic to talk about or seek assistance for
- ☐ No, the issues that I deal with aren't talked about in my direct environment
- ☐ This is difficult topic to talk about
- ☐ Acknowledging that you could have mental health issues is a sign of weakness and the topics are avoided, which doesn't help

So how are we doing ...?



So “how are we doing?”

- Most of the people replied : I’m fine ... (68 %)
- Already had prior issues, but the situation isn’t helping (26.7 %)
- Already had prior issues, but it is easier now (4.49 %)

If someone asks you “How are you ...?”

- How do you respond?
 - Is that a curtesy question with an expected reply: ‘I’m fine?’
 - Or are they genuinely asking about your mental state: ‘How do you feel?’
- Context, culture and who is asking

What happens if you...

- Would you actually tell me how you feel?
- What happens if you say that you are struggling with ...
 - The COVID-19 social distancing
 - The kids running around the house while you are trying to juggle work
 - The (near) future due to financial stability
 - Feel lonely
 - Or suffer from the loss of someone you knew or love

Do you worry about your financial situation?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I don't have to worry about my financial situation in relation to my work	72.15%
I worry about job / financial stability and this is stressful	27.85%

Is talking about emotions / feelings accepted ...



Is talking about emotions / feelings accepted ...

- In certain countries or religion groups
- Especially if in those groups or cultures:
 - Depression or suicide officially doesn't exist
 - Or being gay is criminalized
 - Or isn't talked about

Some grim stats

- 2/3 of the people who die due to suicide are male
- They are in the age group : between 40 – 70 years old
- Depression is the most common mental health issue in this group
- Per year 1,900 people die (in The Netherlands alone) by suicide.
- Which is on avg. 5 per day (Attempts is 25 times higher – about 135 per day for NL)
- The group of young people dealing with depression is rising at an alarming rate.
- There is still a huge taboo to talk about suicide.

- Source : 113.nl (Suicide prevention foundation in The Netherlands)
 - <https://www.113.nl/sites/default/files/113/2020%20middelen/Factsheet-suicide%20facts%20and%20figures.pdf>

Q: Have you had suicidal thoughts/ideation?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I am experiencing suicidal thoughts at the moment	2.78%
I am experiencing suicidal thoughts at the moment and have done in the past	4.17%
I have experienced suicidal thoughts in the past but I don't now	31.94%
I have never had suicidal thoughts	61.11%

So where do we stand currently ...

- Most people responded about:
- Experiences of stress in relation to work or private related issues
 - Kids being home schooled while trying to work
 - Feeling cut out of their regular social environment due to COVID-19/feeling lonely
 - Feeling of insecurity about financial future
 - Some responded about burnout related effects or experiences.
 - Some responded about depressions and/or suicide

Is there a magic solution?

- Unfortunately not
- However being able to talk about this ... being heard ... recognising that someone isn't alone ... helps
- Can we, as a community, provide a way to discuss these topics to relieve the feeling or perception of being alone in this?
- Offer some assistance by listening or even acknowledging that work related stress is more common than one would initially think

The RIPE Community

- The RIPE Community is all of us ...
- This isn't only when we are talking about IPv4 or v6 .. Or Routing policies or charging schemes
- We need each other and as a (healthy) community that also means that we should provide assistance for people when we are not feeling ok. Or stressed.

What now ?

- We're planning an Open House meetup
- The Mental Health initiative group is going to review the results of the questionnaire and community response and discuss the topic of a communication platform.
- Decide from there, on where and how.

How can you help ?

- Talk to the Program Committee of your local events / NOG / IXP ... See if you can get this topic discussed in your local community
- Provide a listening ear for people who could need someone to talk to ..
Exchange your experiences amongst each other
- Sometimes you're a mentor, other times a mentee.
- Avoid judging people about mental health related issues... It is how we perceive and react, that really makes a difference in our lives

Need to reach out ?

- Feel free to reach out to the Mental Health initiative group.
 - We are not professionals, we care and listen and can perhaps give some advice.
 - Vesna Manojlovic – BECHA @ripe.net Erik Bais – erik @bais.name
 - Carolien Vos – cvos @ripe.net Eileen Gallagher - eileen.Gallagher @inex.ie
- In case of suicide thoughts, call your general practitioner or reach out to a national suicide hotline.
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_suicide_crisis_lines

Questions?

