
NOAA Corps Junior Officer Advisory Committee

2018 Work-Life Balance Survey

Executive Summary and Analysis

LT Daniel Langis, LT Jesse Milton, LT Michael Silagi, LTJG Diane Perry, LTJG Dustin Picard
On behalf of the NJAC Survey Working Group

September 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Executive Summary.....	3
II. Introduction.....	4
A. NOAA Corps Junior Officer Advisory Committee	4
B. Survey Background.....	4
III. Results	5
A. Report Summary.....	5
B. Basic Demographic Info	5
C. Potential Consequences of Poor Work-Life Balance	8
D. Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Leave	13
E. Potential Solutions to Improve Work-Life Balance.....	19
F. Survey Effectiveness	24
IV. Analysis and Recommendations	25
A. Strategic Goals	25
B. Actionable Solutions	27
V. Conclusion.....	31
A. Next Steps	31
VI. Recognition.....	31
A. Contributions.....	31

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was requested by senior leadership and coordinated by the NOAA Corps Junior Officer Advisory Committee (NJAC) to better understand work-life balance issues and to develop strategies for advancing the health, resilience, and effectiveness of the NOAA Corps.

“Work-Life Balance” is an expansive topic that encompasses every aspect of NOAA Corps Officers’ personal and professional lives. However, this survey was intended to be concise and provide insight on the most critical work-life balance issues which were likely to lead to actionable solutions.

This report includes major findings from the survey. 188 junior officers (O-1 through O-3) were surveyed and 118 anonymous responses were recorded (62% response rate). Answers and comments reflected a wide variety of opinions and experiences by junior officers, ranging from very positive to very negative. A comprehensive list of all questions, answers, and comments are provided as an Appendix which may provide more insight than is possible in this report.

The Survey Working Group identified three strategic goals to improve work-life balance for Junior Officers in the NOAA Corps based on themes in the survey results:

1. Promote cultural acceptance of rest and provide better organizational means for officers to receive adequate rest.
2. Champion continuous improvement of administrative and support services.
3. Improve consistency in the application of policies and practices across the organization.

The Survey Working Group also identified actionable solutions in four main areas to attain the strategic goals listed above:

1. Provide supervisors with training, recommendations, and incentives for improving work-life balance of junior officers
2. Provide more guidance on the use of special liberty
3. Improve augmentation system, explore rotational assignments, and increase staffing
4. Create a pipeline for providing feedback on and improving various administrative services

Implementing solutions to improve work-life balance will require an on-going dialog between junior and senior officers. Support for this survey and work-life balance initiatives thus far has been promising and points to significant opportunities to positively impact the NOAA Corps and NOAA/OMAO as a whole.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. NOAA CORPS JUNIOR OFFICER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The NOAA Corps Junior Officer Advisory Committee (NJAC) is a group of approximately 80 volunteer junior officers (JOs; O-3 and below). Its mission is to provide a direct line of communication between JOs and NOAA Corps leadership. The NJAC is divided into five regions: Aircraft Operations Center, East Coast, Gulf of Mexico, West Coast, and Pacific Islands. The Executive Board, consisting of two delegates from each region, coordinates NJAC priorities and may communicate directly with OMAO leadership.

B. SURVEY BACKGROUND

This NJAC work-life balance Survey stemmed from findings during a survey of junior officers in 2016. One question in the survey asked if JOs felt they had a sustainable work-life balance. 75% of officers who completed the 2016 survey indicated they did not have a sustainable work-life balance. Only 19% of officers indicated they did have a sustainable work-life balance. Comments were provided, but no other specific questions were asked about work life balance.

In December 2016, results of the 2016 survey were presented to NOAA Corps Senior Leadership. After a candid discussion, senior officers suggested that additional follow-up surveys would be beneficial to delve deeper into the topic of work-life balance and to identify potential corrective actions. The comments in the 2016 survey were also compiled and quantified to provide a starting point for many of the items in this survey.

A Survey Working Group (SWG) of volunteer officers was established with the help of the NJAC. The survey was released in June 2018 to all JOs (all officers O-1 through O-3). The survey was open for 30 days. The survey closed on June 30, 2018, with responses provided by 116 out of 188 JOs (62% response rate).

III. RESULTS

A. REPORT SUMMARY

This report features major findings from the 5 sections of the survey - (1) basic demographic info, (2) potential consequences of poor work-life balance, (3) perspectives on work-life balance and leave, (4) potential solutions to improve work-life balance, and (5) survey effectiveness.

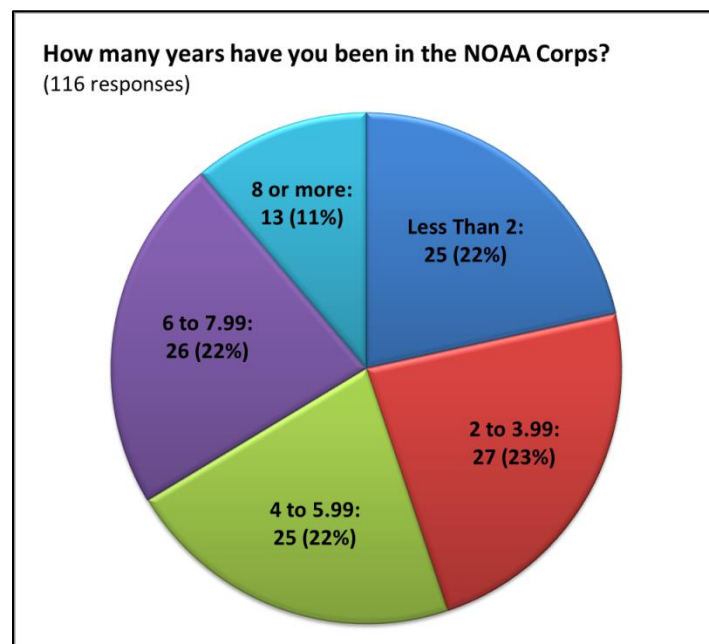
Note that all *italicized comments* provided in this report are direct quotes from survey respondents which do not necessarily reflect views of the NJAC Survey Working Group or Executive Council. Comments are intended to be illustrative of the range of views expressed on particular topics.

B. BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC INFO

The survey collected basic demographic information on time in service, age, gender, assignment, and marital status. The objective was to gain a general understanding of the entire survey group and to identify any significant disparities between demographic groups.

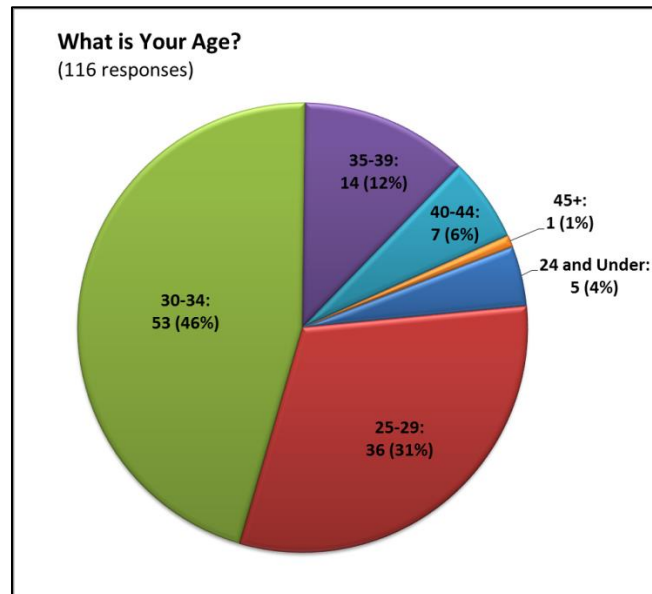
1. TIME IN SERVICE

Time in service provided insight into how long officers have served within the Corps. The question was divided into five sections, separated into two-year intervals. Respondents were evenly divided across most groups; however, only a few JOs with more than 8 years in service completed the survey. This is likely due to fewer officers still being JOs once they have more than 8 years of service in the NOAA Corps..



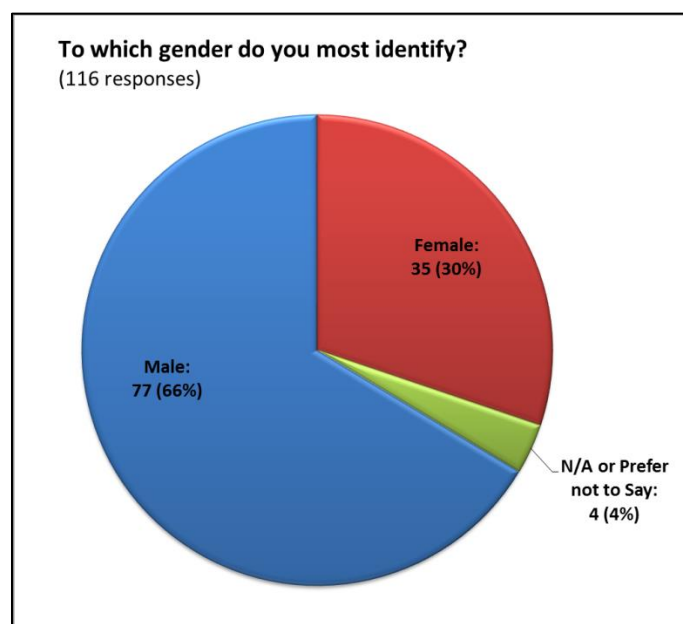
2. AGE

The age of the officer served as an important designation for survey participants as career and personal priorities can change with age. The survey question was divided into six choices, separated by five years each. Age groups include 24 and under, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, and 45 and over. A majority of respondents (77%) were ages 25-34.



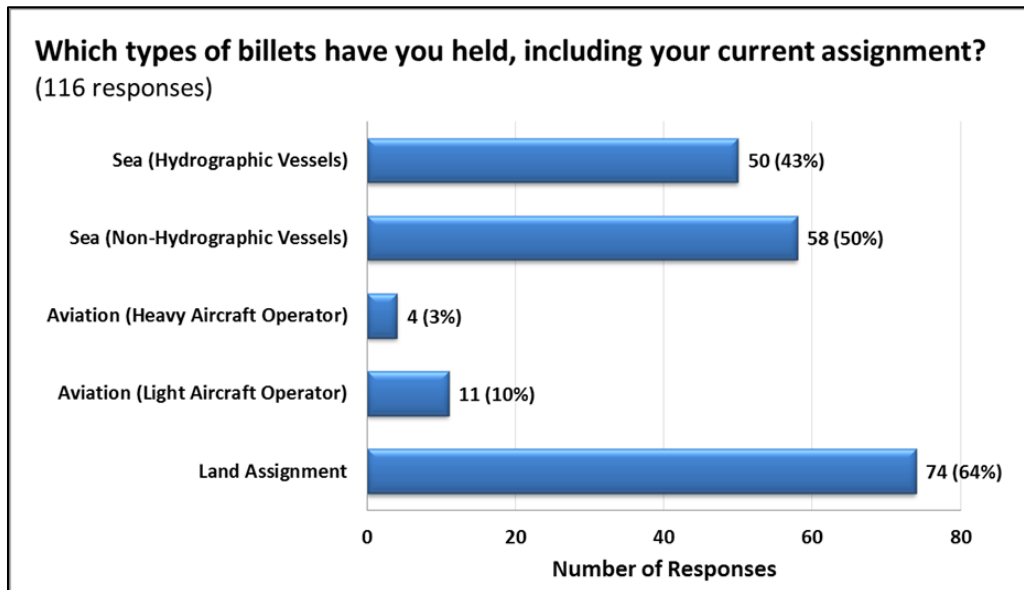
3. GENDER

Gender was included in the demographics to identify any imbalances or potential inequality between genders. The choices were given: male, female, and prefer not say (or other). Roughly $\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents (66%) were male, 30% were female, and 3.4% did not say or declared other.



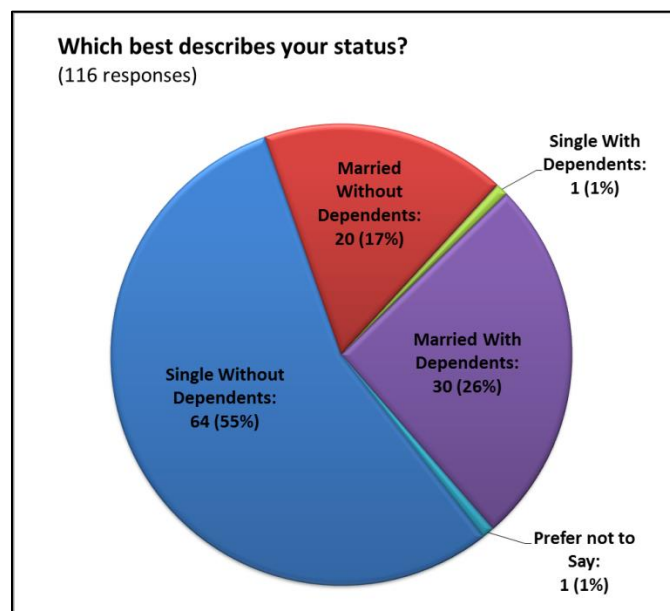
4. ASSIGNMENT HISTORY

JOs were polled on which billets they have held, including Aviation assignments (Heavy and Light Aircraft Operator), Sea assignments (Hydrographic and Non-Hydrographic Vessels), and Land assignments. Understanding the diversity of assignments provides insight into the work-life balance for specific career paths and in different situations.



5. MARITAL STATUS

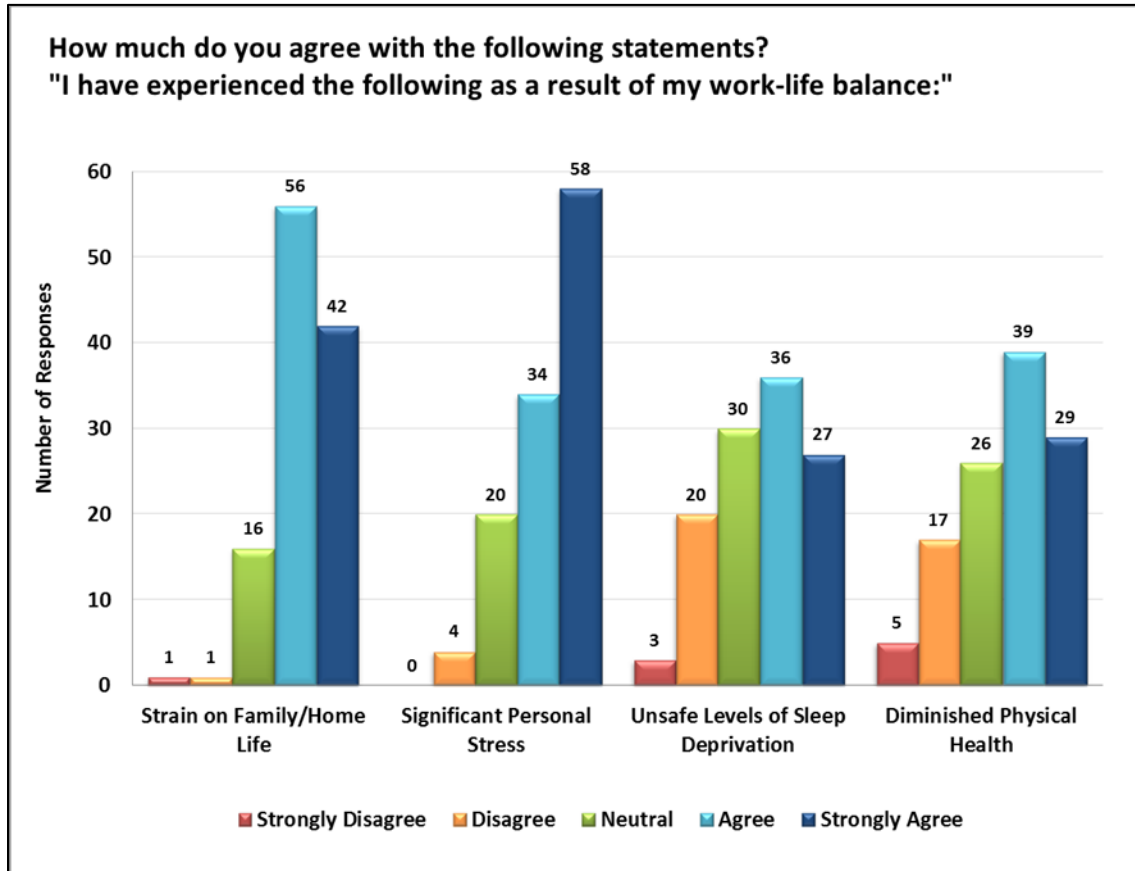
Lastly, officers were questioned about their marital status. Marital status plays a significant role on how one views work-life balance. Additional stress at home can significantly impact an officer's work experience. Alternatively, stress in the workplace can negatively carry over to home life.



C. POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF POOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Section 2 of the survey asked about personal and organizational consequences of poor work-life balance. Specifically, the survey polled how strongly junior officers agreed poor work-life balance led to experiences of strain on family/home life, significant personal stress, unsafe levels of sleep deprivation, diminished physical health, and whether these consequences influenced an individual officer's consideration to separate.

1. POTENTIAL INDIVIDUAL CONSEQUENCES



As shown in the above chart, Strain on Family/Home Life and Significant Personal Stress were shown to be the most common consequences of poor work-life balance. 98 (84% of) respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that they had experienced Strain on Family/Home Life because of work-life balance. 92 (79% of) respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that they had experienced Significant Personal Stress. Although Strain on Family/Home Life received the most affirmative responses, Significant Personal Stress was more polarizing with 54 (50% of) respondents answering with "strongly agree" while Strain on Family/Home Life received 42 responses of "strongly agree" (36%).

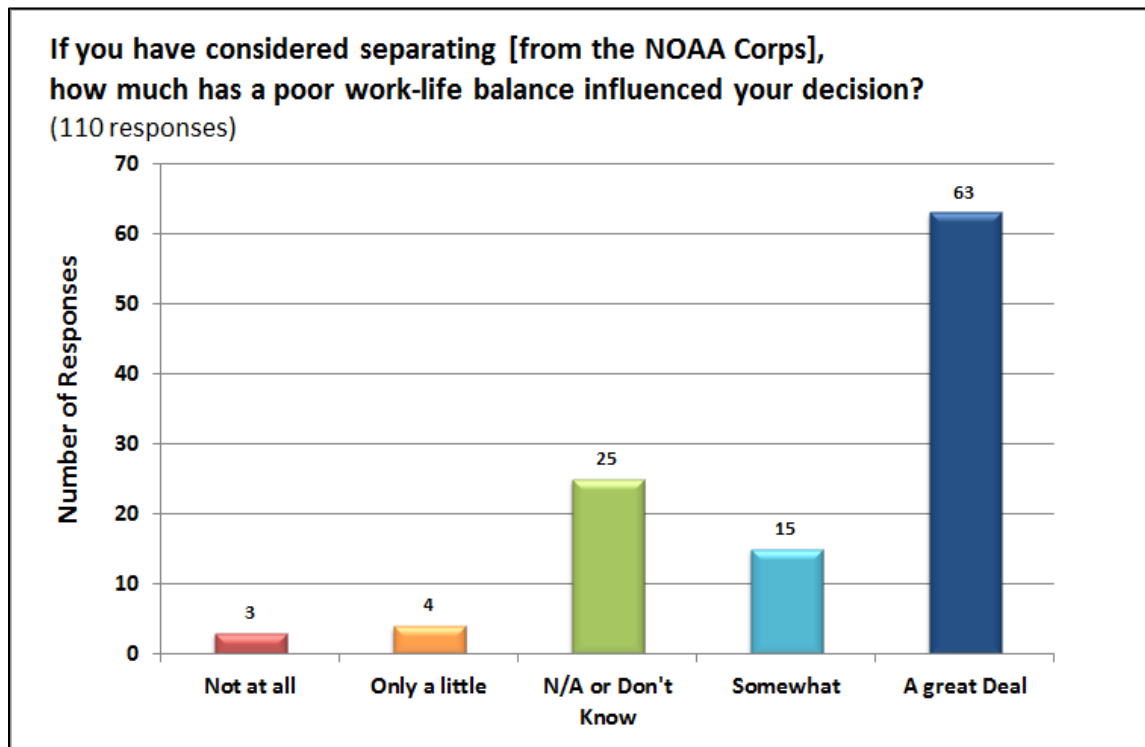
68 (59%) and 63 (54% of) respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that they experienced Diminished Physical Health and Unsafe Levels of Sleep Deprivation respectively. These two consequences are less prevalent, but still significant factors because over half of respondents acknowledged to have experienced them.

When comparing responses from officers who have held different types of assignments (hydro, non-hydro, aviation, and land), no significant disparities were apparent. (Note there is overlap in the table below for officers who have held multiple types of assignments.)

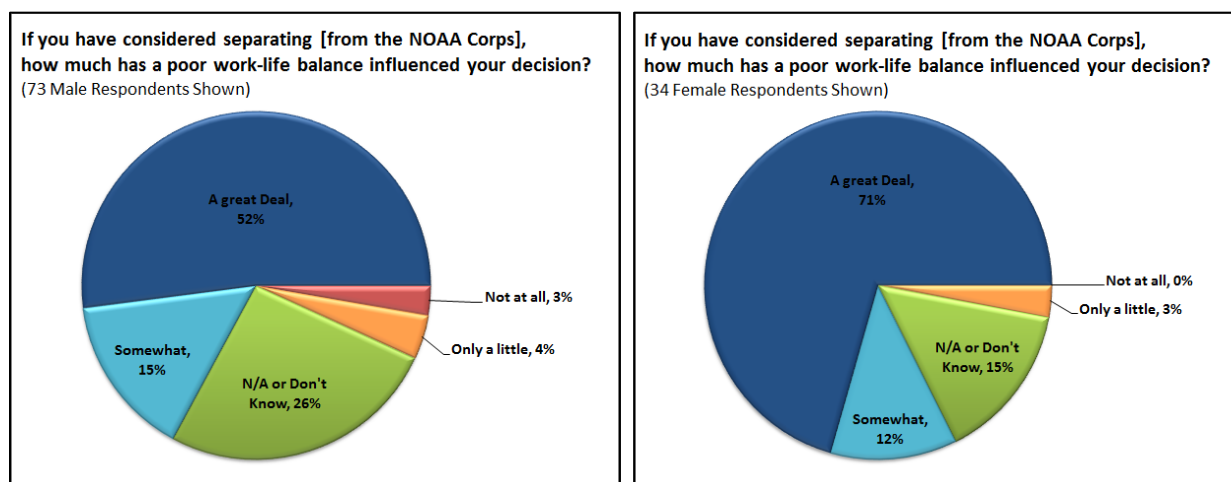
How much do you agree with the following statements? "I have experienced the following as a result of my work-life balance:"					
	Sea (Hydro) (50 Responses)	Sea (Non-Hydro) (58 Responses)	Aviation (13 Responses)	Land (74 Responses)	
Strain on Family/Home Life	2%	0%	0%	1%	Strongly Disagree
	0%	2%	0%	1%	Disagree
	16%	10%	8%	8%	Neutral
	48%	50%	46%	51%	Agree
	34%	38%	46%	38%	Strongly Agree
Significant Personal Stress	0%	0%	0%	0%	Strongly Disagree
	4%	3%	0%	3%	Disagree
	18%	17%	31%	14%	Neutral
	28%	36%	23%	32%	Agree
	50%	43%	46%	51%	Strongly Agree
Unsafe Levels of Sleep Deprivation	2%	3%	0%	4%	Strongly Disagree
	24%	12%	23%	16%	Disagree
	12%	34%	31%	23%	Neutral
	38%	28%	15%	28%	Agree
	24%	22%	31%	28%	Strongly Agree
Diminished Physical Health	2%	7%	8%	4%	Strongly Disagree
	12%	16%	15%	14%	Disagree
	24%	21%	15%	23%	Neutral
	38%	31%	38%	31%	Agree
	24%	26%	23%	28%	Strongly Agree

Although less than half of junior officers surveyed claim dependents, the survey results show organizationally allocating more time for junior officers to continue to garner and build relationships outside of work in addition to more time for officers to visit and support current family units will generate a more positive work-life balance. Therefore, any potential activities to improve junior officer work-life balance focusing on allowing time for personal connections outside of work, and empowering junior officers to manage stress productively in a high-tempo environment will help address the greatest calls for change.

2. POTENTIAL ORGANIZATIONAL CONSEQUENCES



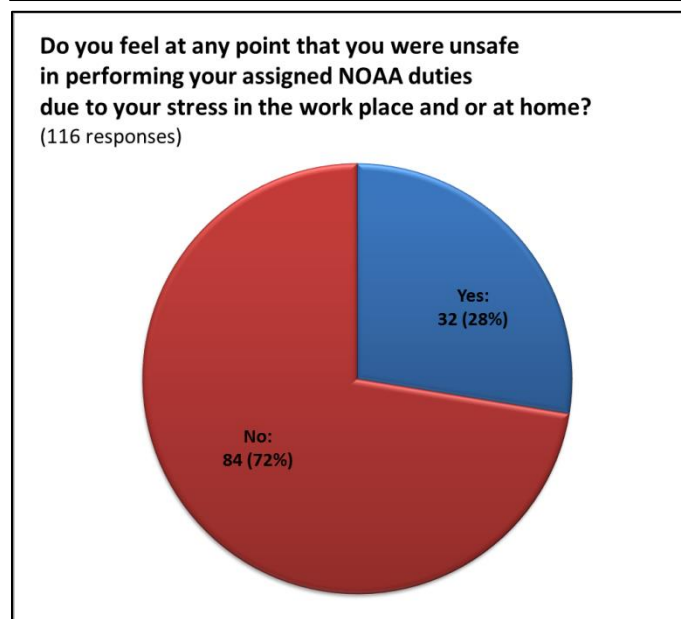
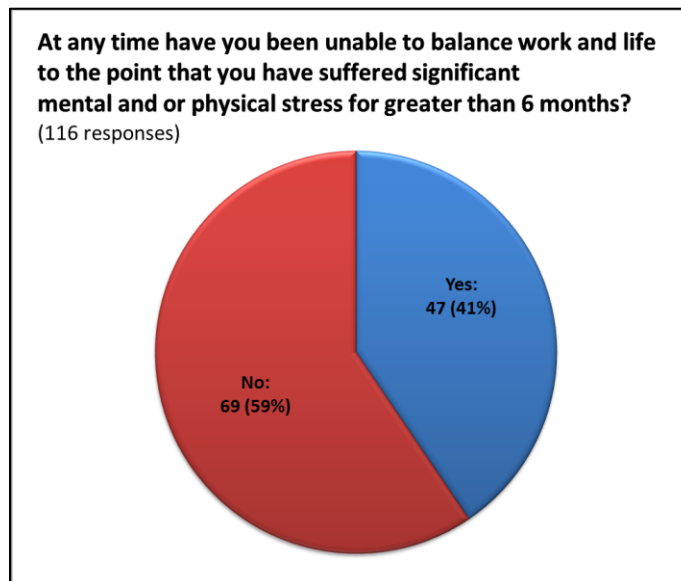
In the above question, 63 out of 110 respondents (57%) indicated that poor work-life balance influenced a consideration to separate “a great deal”. Only 7 respondents indicated work-life balance had little or no influence on their consideration.



Of the respondents who answered the above question, 73 were male (left chart above) and 34 were female (right chart above). 71% of female respondents indicated they had considered separating and that poor work-life balance had influenced them “a great deal.” 52% of male respondents answered similarly. These statistics illustrate work-life balance plays a vital role in retention, especially for female officers.

3. POTENTIAL SEVERE CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS AND SAFETY

Two questions were developed with input from the Director of Health Services at OMAO to explore more severe consequences of stress and safety.



47 (41% of) respondents reported that at some point they had not been able to balance work and life to a point of suffering significant mental and/or physical stress for greater than 6 months.

32 (28% of) respondents reported that at some point they felt unsafe in performing their assigned duties due to stress in the workplace or at home.

The above percentages correlate with results from Question 1 in this section in that significant personal stress is experienced more frequently than unsafe levels of sleep deprivation.

4. POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE SHORT ANSWER

Survey Question: Please comment on any other consequences (positive or negative) you have experienced because of your work-life balance.

Short answers amended to this section asked for any additional consequences, but tended to reflect the same results as above. 44 written responses out of 62 (71%) submitted provided specific examples of strains on family and personal relationships.

"I feel both my quality of my work and interest in what I'm doing, and in my interactions with people outside of work end up suffering because of this imbalance."

I have had countless positive experiences with this job, and I very much enjoy the day-to-day work that we do...However, I have also missed a lot of important events in my family's timeline due to the job (weddings, funerals, holidays, birthdays, first steps, first words, etc). At the end of the day, there are some family matters that cannot be replaced or compensated for."

Other examples included loss of friendships, the inability to build a family, and fears of divorce. The next highest cumulative topic of discussion was 42 (68% of) responses regarding personal stress taking a toll due to lack of personal time to recharge mentally, maintain sleep, and retain healthy habits.

"Mental stress related to excessive work, lack of sleep, and personal issues as a result of being underway for too long led to development of unhealthy habits. Further, lack of balance while underway led to significant consideration of separation."

"Due to stress levels and not being able to get enough time to physically and mentally recover I've dealt with some internal medical issues. The doctors have advised to lower stress levels and take some personal time. When time off was requested for just a couple days to be able to get away from the ship it was denied due to it being during the field season."

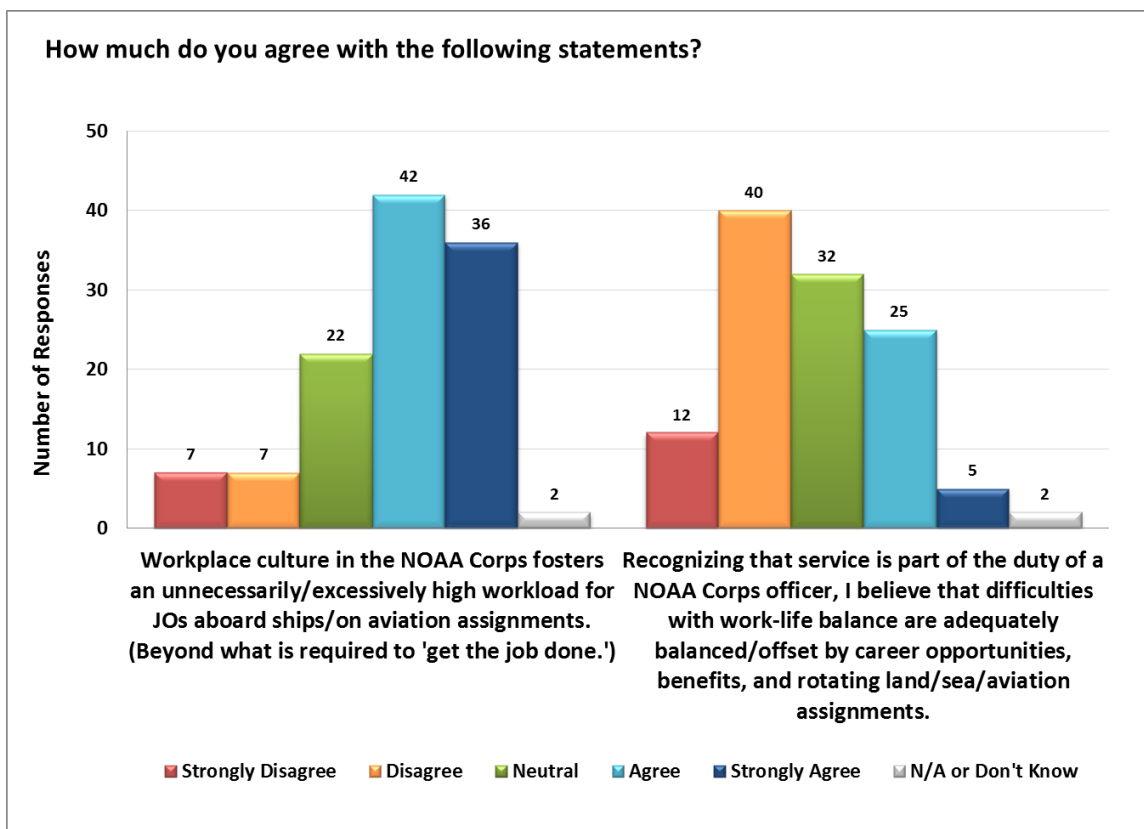
"While I have encountered considerable stress and hardship, these were challenges that I was well aware of before joining the NOAA corps and are mostly not outside of what is required to do the job."

These comments show a need for officers feel empowered to allocate more time to relationships outside of work and to themselves during high-tempo operations.

D. PERSPECTIVES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND LEAVE

Section 3 of the survey focused on junior officer's perspectives on work-life balance and leave.

1. WORKPLACE CULTURE AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE



67% of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that workplace culture fosters an unnecessarily high workload (beyond what is required to 'get the job done') during ship and aviation assignments.

26% of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) when asked if the benefits associated with being a uniform service member outweigh the difficulties balancing work-life conflicts. 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

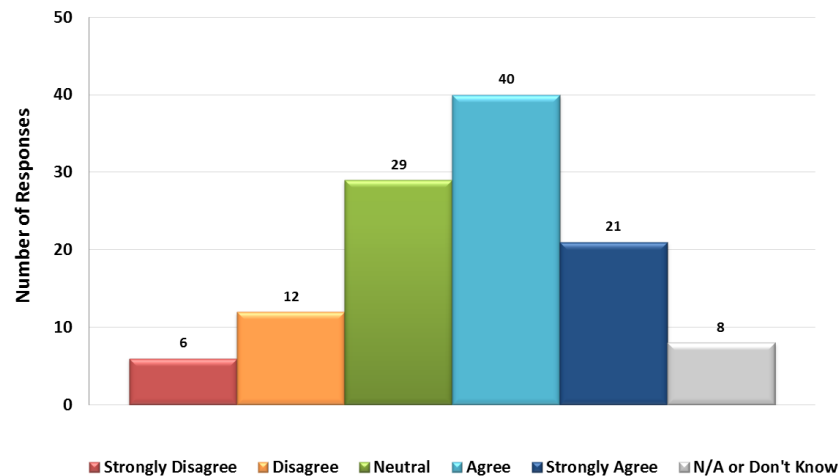
Comments in this section further elaborated the effect workplace culture has on the perspective of work-life balance. 48 out of 73 comments indicated the organizational culture as promoting a climate that was unsupportive, unfair, or unsafe.

"My primary struggle was there was an attitude, both explicit and implicit, that officer should ALWAYS be working. I understand trying to set a high standard and make it clear that we are professionals as a uniformed service, but I felt I had very little room to be myself or take care of myself."

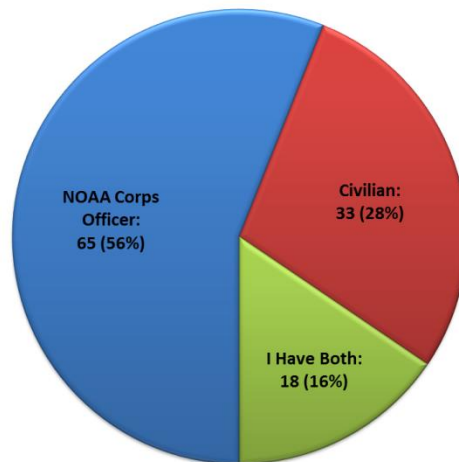
"Had a discussion with multiple senior officers who were 'amazed that so many NOAA Officers were taking leave during the field season'. I held my tongue as my first CO encouraged at least one leg off during the field season."

2. SUPERVISOR SUPPORT

How much do you agree with the following statement?
My work life-balance in the NOAA Corps is sustainable because of my supervisor



Is your supervisor (Leave Granting Authority)
a civilian or a NOAA Corps Officer?
(116 responses)



35 out of 73 comments in this section (48%) indicated that officers' supervisors supported taking time off and focusing on personal matters. Comments varied from supervisor-to-supervisor and by assignment type.

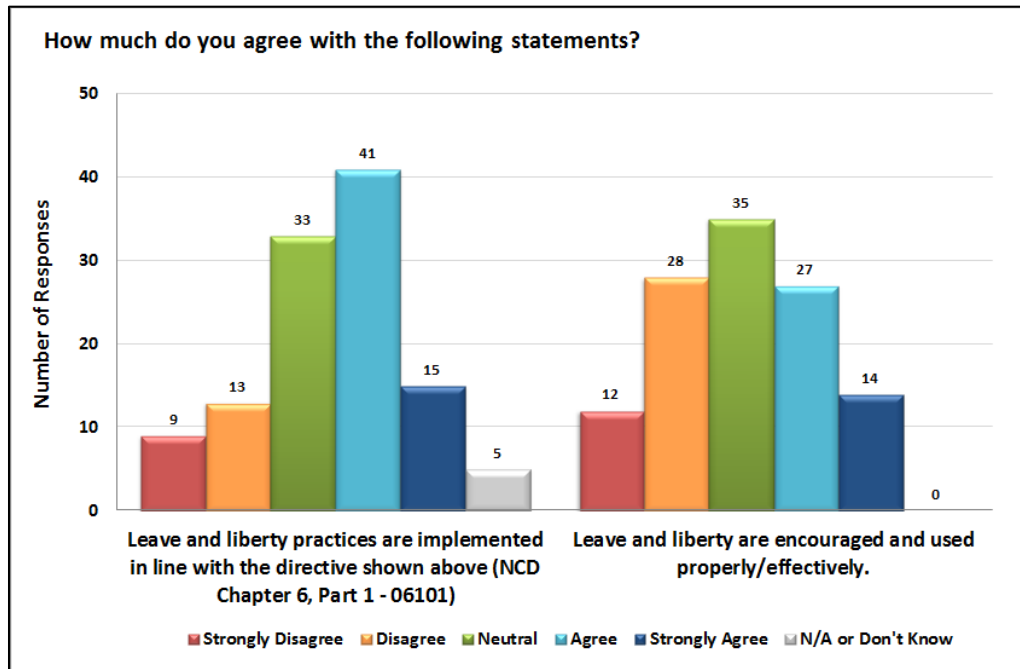
"While the CO and XO took leave during the field season to visit their families, this was not approved for junior officers."

"The schedule during my first assignment did not allow for a work/life balance at all. However, my current supervisor has encouraged me to focus on myself more."

"Maybe I'm just fortunate, but my last three supervisors have all been great about letting me take leave whenever I want, operational needs permitting."

3. LEAVE AND LIBERTY PRACTICES

Chapter 6, Part 1 - 06101 of the NOAA Corps Directives states "*Leave, liberty, and administrative absence policies for NOAA Corps officers will be consistent, insofar as possible, with the policies of other uniformed services as required by law. These policies provide respite from the work environment in ways that contribute to improved performance, increased motivation, and ensure maximum use of, while minimizing the loss of earned leave.*" This directive was included in the survey and used as a baseline for officers to gauge the effectiveness and implementation of leave and liberty.



Officers' views were widely different on whether leave and liberty are encouraged and used properly and effectively, with an almost even number agreeing (35%) vs. disagreeing (34%).

Some difference was evident between male and female respondents on the second part of this question. 43% of male respondents agreed or strongly agreed that leave and liberty are encouraged and used properly/effectively vs. 20% of female respondents who responded similarly.

How much do you agree with the following statement?		
Leave and liberty are encouraged and used properly/effectively.		
	Male (77 Responses)	Female (35 Responses)
Strongly Disagree	8%	14%
Disagree	23%	26%
Neutral	26%	40%
Agree	29%	11%
Strongly Agree	14%	9%

Comments in this section (17 out of 73) indicate that the use of leave and liberty within the NOAA Corps is not viewed as consistent with the practices of other uniformed services and that the use of leave and liberty is often dependent on command climate.

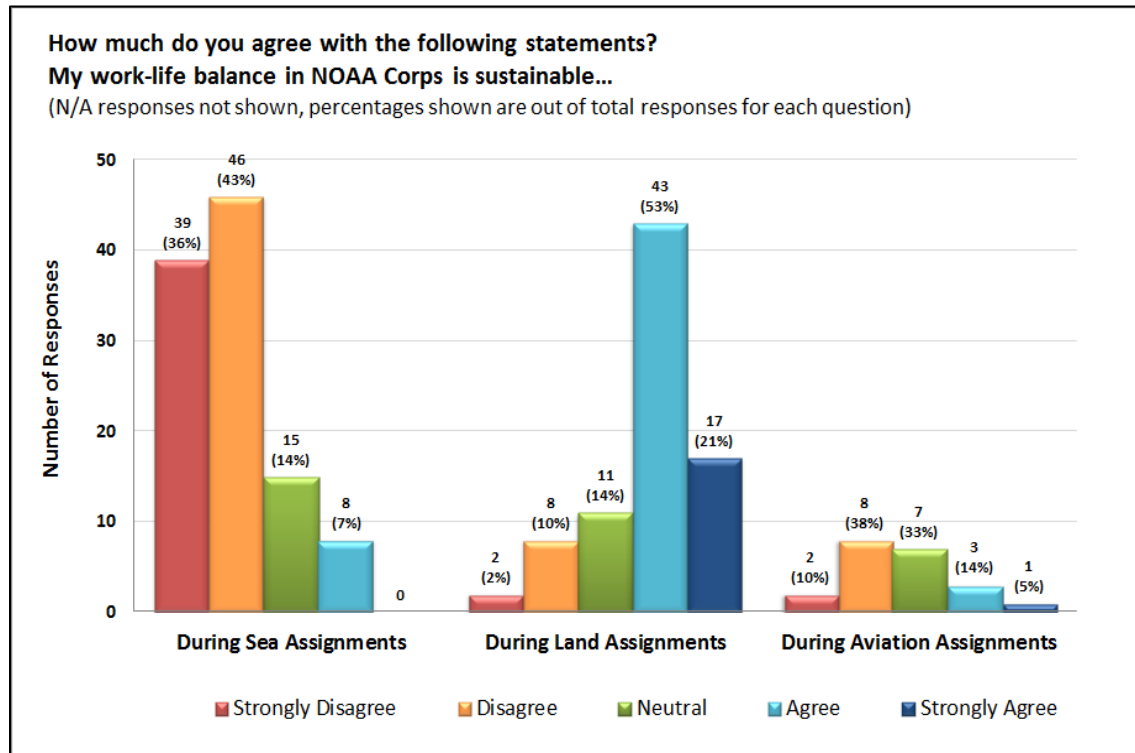
"Since I gained my 60 days of leave, I have lost leave every single year due to denied or revoked leave. JO, particularly ENS carry the brunt of the duty on weekends and holidays with no opportunity to make that up. Example, my first sea tour in 2 1/2 years, I had duty on every single holiday without exception and only 4 days of leave during that time. That would be fine if there was a shore assignment that allowed leave, but if you are given a high op tempo billet those opportunities do not exist."

"Why do we pick and choose DOD/UCMJ policies? It feels like we follow the convenient policies for our officers and then other armed service's policies such as military maternity and paternity policies are not followed? We need clarification."

"And there comes a point where the work needs to get done, so work-life balance is moot. That is why we get retirement when we do. As Corps Officers, it is our job to get the job done."

4. SUSTAINABLE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Survey Prompt: A common definition of a sustainable work-life balance is one that supports individuals to be productive on and off the job over the course of their working lives (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014).



Responses show that perspectives on sustainability of work-life balance differ greatly between land, sea, and aviation assignments. Work-life balance is largely viewed as unsustainable during sea and aviation assignments.

The ability to manage a healthy work-life balance varied greatly by assignment type. Of officer's who have had a land assignment, 72% reported a sustainable work-life balance during those land assignments. Conversely, 79% of the officers who have had a sea assignment didn't feel their work-life balance was sustainable. 48% of the officers who have had an aviation assignment didn't feel their work-life balance was sustainable. (Note that only 13 officers identified as having held aviation billets in an earlier question, yet 21 answered this question for aviation assignments. It is likely that some non-aviation officers selected "neutral" rather than "N/A" and the percentage of negative responses may actually be higher than 48%.)

"Finding childcare options have been very difficult when I go out to sea or have training. It is what has kept us from having a second child."

"The NOAA Corps lifestyle is difficult with a spouse with professional ambitions. Because we are not eligible for military spouse preferences on USAjobs, and explaining why you've moved every 1-3 years on a resume is difficult, it's often very hard to find a position that suits fits the needs of a spouse."

"My personal work life balance concerns primarily relate to prolonged periods away from my family and unexpectedly shortened periods ashore, rather than the workload I encounter as part of my job duties."

5. OPEN RESPONSE FOR PERSPECTIVES

Survey Question: Please comment on any other attitudes or concerns you have about the topics in this section as they relate to work-life balance.

Organizational planning and insufficient shore-side support were often mentioned as causes of stress and an inability to plan for the future. While operations often require schedules to be flexible, comments suggest that more can be done to support officers and promote a better work-life balance.

"Hold shore-side responsible to provide support to the ships and when new policy/regulations are considered think of how much time it will add to the already overworked officers/crew. Collateral duties have snowballed from 2012-2018 and there is no end in sight."

"Land assignments are not 'land only' for pilots. We are kept on the hook to fly all the time. Pilot attrition is making the situation worse."

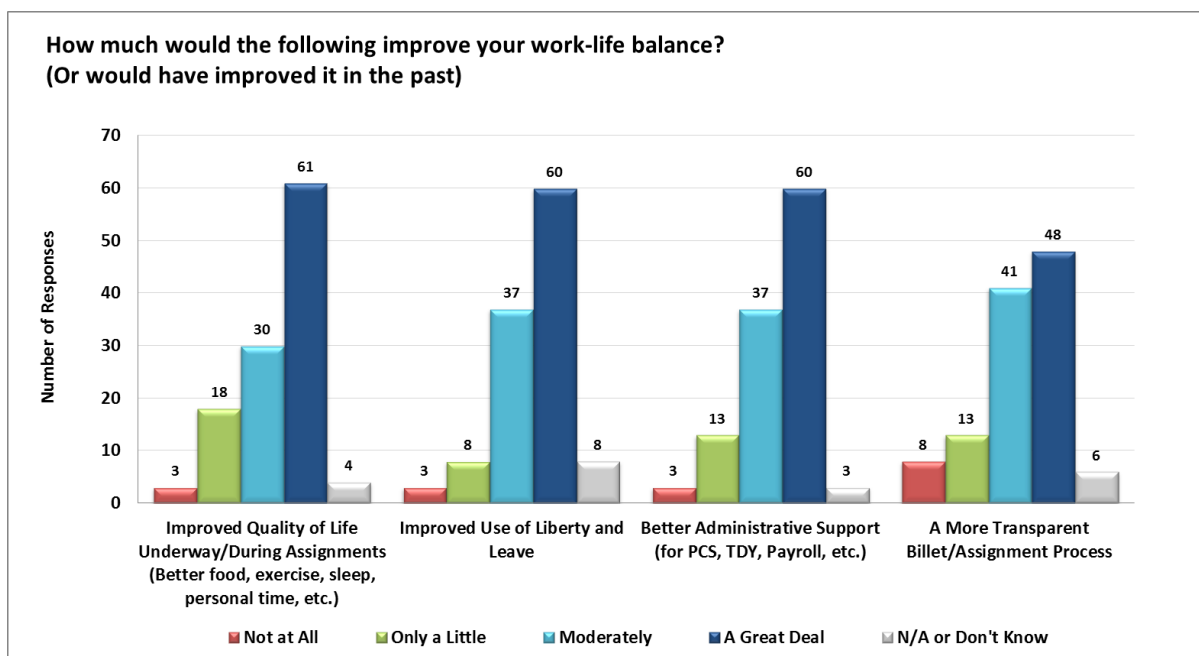
"Some of that excess duties stem from the lack of boundaries when ANY line office needs ANYTHING, officers get tasked with things which are not related to their billet or even remotely related to their office's mission. I have heard many times 'x office usually does y', 'y' being completely unrelated to 'office x's mission', which perhaps started 10 years ago when an officer in x office had an interest in y, now 10 years later, whoever reports to office x is bulldozed into working with task y."

E. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The main objectives of the potential solutions section of the survey were to offer 9 areas of solutions and two more specific policy change proposals to gauge junior officer support, provide an open forum for officers to communicate specific solutions for improving work-life balance during arduous duty assignments, and to provide an open forum for officers to communicate solutions not yet mentioned.

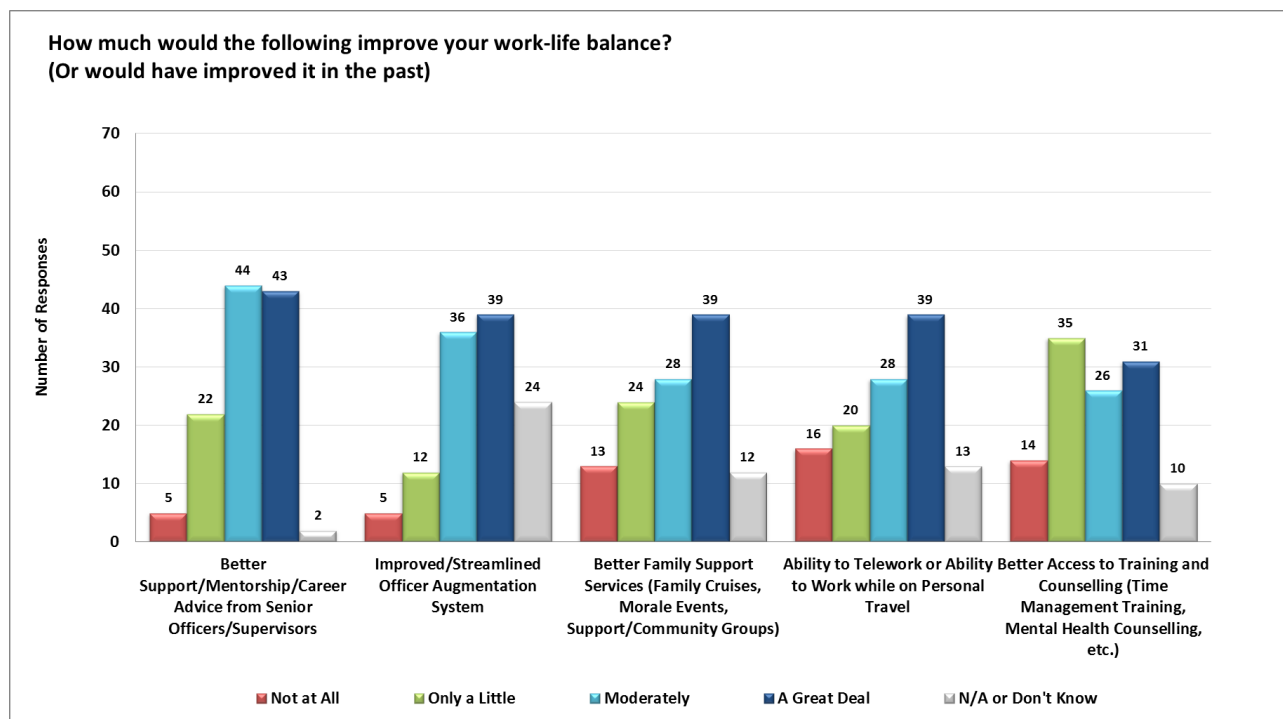
1. RANKING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS 1-9

In the first question of this section, nine potential solutions were presented and surveyors were asked whether those solutions would improve work-life balance. The top three solutions which respondents said would have improved work life balance “A Great Deal” were: Improved Quality of Life Underway/During Assignments with 61 responses (53%), Improved Use of Liberty and Leave with 60 responses (52%), and Better Administrative Support with 60 responses (52%).



In these top three solutions, responses of “Moderately” and “Only a Little” varied. Quality of Life Underway/During Assignments may have received the highest number of “A Great Deal” responses; however, 30 respondents (26%) believed this solution would have a moderate effect while 18 respondents (16%) believed it would have only a little effect. In comparison, a larger number of respondents (37 versus 30) felt Improved Use of Liberty and Leave will have a moderate effect while only 8 respondents (7%) felt it would have little benefit. Factoring the less enthusiastic responses to these solutions in such as way provided an alternative ranking of which solutions will have the widest impact. The alternative ranking in order of greatest impact is: Improved Use of Liberty and Leave, Better Administrative Support, and Quality of Life Underway/During Assignments. Efforts to improve any of these three areas are likely to have the largest impact, highest visibility, and best reflection of Junior Officers’ needs.

In the graph above, A More Transparent Billet/Assignment Process is ranked 4th. The graph below continues to rank the proposed solutions by responses of “A Great Deal” from left to right.

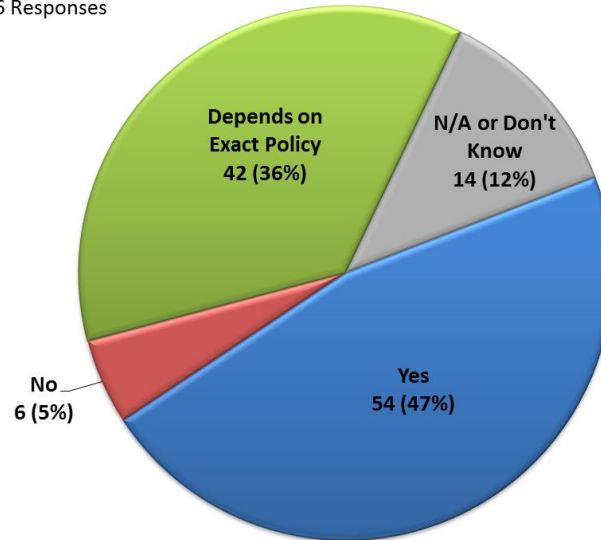


Better Access to Training and Counselling is ranked 9th; however, there were 13 specific mentions of mental health concerns from the comment sections, suggesting it is still a critical issue for some officers.

2. FORMAL AUGMENTATION AND LONGER SEA ASSIGNMENT POLICIES

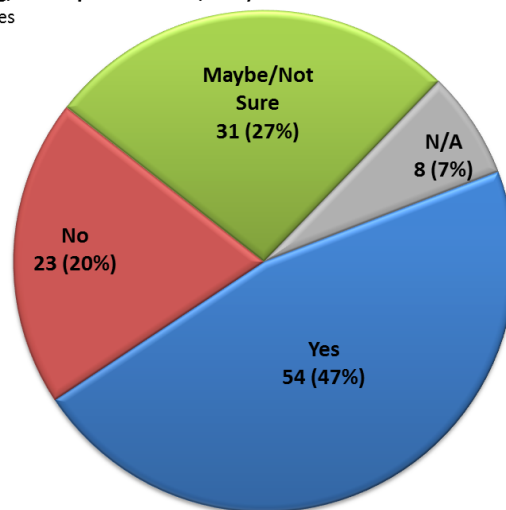
Would you support a more formal augmentation policy for junior officers? (For example, one augmentation per year, with exceptions for TDY/arduous duty land assignments.)

116 Responses



Would you support longer ship-board assignments if it guaranteed more flexibility and opportunities for leave during the assignments? (For example, increasing the standard assignment from 2 years to 2.5 years to allow for leave and opportunities for augmenting officers, but still provide ample opportunity for training, OOD qualifications, etc.)

116 responses



The two questions above asked polled officers to give support for specific policy changes. However, a majority consensus could not be found with many officers responding cautiously with greater than a third answering 'it depends on the exact policy', 'N/A', or 'not sure'. Only 6 respondents gave an outright 'No' response to a more formal and scheduled augmentation policy whereas 23 gave 'No' responses to extending sea assignments to give more opportunities for leave.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ARDUOUS DUTY ASSIGNMENTS

Survey Question: What practices, policies, or benefits could be put in place to improve work-life balance for those on arduous assignments, away from home port for extended periods, etc.? (Quality of life flights, allowing PCS family moves to OCONUS/alternate locations, and monetary benefits were mentioned in the initial survey.) Please be specific.

Leading examples (Quality of Life Flights, PCS moves to OCONUS/Alternate Locations, and Monetary Compensation) were sourced from the 2016 survey. The response rate was 78% with 90 submissions and out of half of those responses 47 agreed on exploring ways to grant quality of life flights. The other solutions garnered more varied support with no more than 15 officers (17%) commenting in direct support of a specific solution (see the table below). It is important to note Monetary Compensation seemed the most desirable to aviators to help keep pilots incentivized.

Solution Topic	Comments in Support (out of 90)
Quality of Life Flights	47
Supervisor Support to Take Leave	15
Liberty Policy Clarity/Best Practices	14
Rotational Assignments	13
TDY Opportunities in Lieu of Leave	13
PCS OCONUS/Alternate Locations	12
Ability to Take Leave During Field Season	11
Monetary Compensation	11
Formalized Augmentation	11
Increase Alongside Periods/ Homeport Visits	7
Increase Personnel	5
Longer Sea Assignments	5
Weekends/Holidays Not Leave Days	4
No Mess Charges	3
Ombudsman	3
Shoreside Admin. Support/Planning	3
Career Support for Spouses	2
Proceed Time After BOTC/House Hunting	3
Wellness (Facilities and Healthy Meals)	2

4. OPEN RESPONSE FOR ANY ADDITIONAL SOLUTIONS

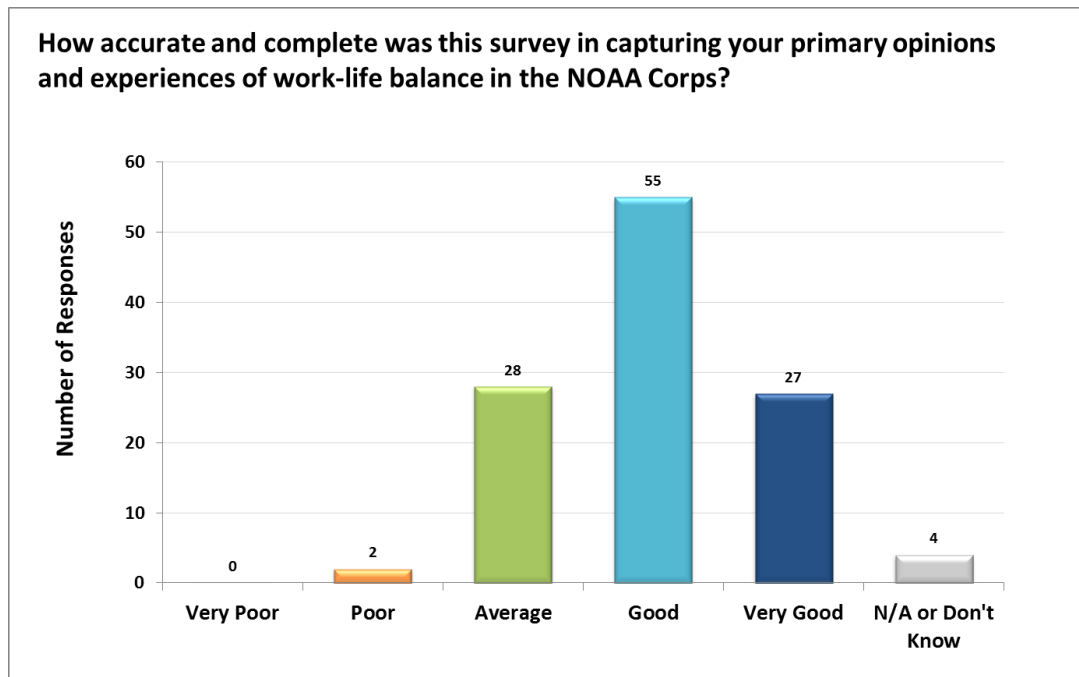
Survey Question: Please comment on any additional solutions you see for improving work-life balance.

The solutions discussed in this section similarly harbored varied support because the question was left open-ended. The response rate was 54% (63 responses). The most commented solutions were related to creating a more supportive culture with 13 separate comments (20%). These comments support the ranking of this solution as 5th in the multiple choice section above. Second was tied for looking into the plausibility of rotational assignments and mitigating collateral duty mission creep both with 9 separate comments (14%).

Solution Topic	Comments in Support (out of 63)
Supportive Culture	13
Rotational Assignments	9
Mitigating Collateral Duty Mission Creep	9
Granting Liberty/Leave	8
Aug Pool Officers/Mates	3
Formalized Augmentation	6
Consistency (Scheduling and Policy)	5
CPC Benefits, Entitlements, & Support Clarity	5
Increase Personnel to Solve Staffing Issues	5
Mentorship Program	4
4 on 4 off 4 on 12 off Watch Schedule	3
Dedicated PT Time	3
Transparent Assignment/Promotion Process	3
Improved Maternity and Paternity Leave	3
Remote Mental Health Services	2
Extended Leave of Absence (Unpaid)	2
Improved Internet Bandwidth	1
Training for Stewards	2

F. SURVEY EFFECTIVENESS

In order to gauge the effectiveness of this survey, respondents were polled on the accuracy and completeness of the survey. Responses ranged from poor to very good. Additionally, officers were given a chance to provide comments on the survey overall. Comments were varied, but a majority of them were supportive of this survey and future surveys as well. All but 2 officers indicated that the survey did an average or better job of capturing their opinions and experiences.



Survey Question: Please use this section to comment on the survey itself or any items not otherwise covered in the previous sections.

The following comments provided by respondents capture some of the positive and negative aspects of the survey.

"Thanks for putting it out! It's good to have an anonymous venue in which to discuss concerns."

"There is more to add or clarify, but overall this survey has been adequate in its intended goal."

"I do not feel like this survey was thorough enough to capture all of the opinions and experiences of junior officers. I honestly do not feel like there is enough help for people to turn to regarding these issues. Throughout my entire NOAA career I have felt unsupported..."

IV. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. STRATEGIC GOALS

The SWG has identified three strategic goals to improve work-life balance for junior officers in the NOAA Corps based on themes in survey results:

1. Promote cultural acceptance of rest and provide better organizational means for officers to receive adequate rest.
2. Champion continuous improvement of administrative and support services.
3. Improve consistency in the application of policies and practices across the organization.

1. PROMOTE CULTURAL ACCEPTANCE OF REST AND PROVIDE BETTER ORGANIZATIONAL MEANS FOR OFFICERS TO RECEIVE ADEQUATE REST.

Rest is essential for maintaining a sustainable work-life balance. (Here, rest is defined as any break from work used to help relax, refresh oneself, or recover strength.)

Nearly 40% of officers in this survey indicated that they experienced significant stress that they were unable to balance for a period of six or more months or greater. A majority of the comments after each section in the survey also pointed to a lack of rest that officers receive due to organizational demands and cultural norms. Lack of rest is evident across time scales. Day-to-day a lack of rest takes shape in officers not having enough time to sleep, exercise, or manage their mental health. Longer term, it takes shape in officers not having the opportunity for days off liberty between cruises and flight duties (i.e. liberty) and not having the ability to take longer breaks during operational assignments (i.e. leave).

Shifting these norms is likely to lead to a vast improvement in work-life balance. The goal in promoting and enabling rest is not to reduce the effectiveness or capacity of officers by limiting work periods, but rather to provide for short periods of intentional respite which officers can use to disengage from stress cycles without guilt and contribute more effectively when working.

Because of the large number of respondents who indicated their work-life balance was unsustainable during sea and aviation assignments, specific tactics for increasing opportunities for rest (Section B) focus primarily on operational billets.

2. CHAMPION CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Many junior officers indicated that administrative and support services are presently less than ideal. Topics mentioned in the survey comments included TDY processing, PCS moves, payroll, family services and continuing education. Services also extended to counselling, mentorship, and support with sexual harassment. The most common critiques in this survey indicated that support services were slow, poorly designed, and/or difficult to access.

Improving administrative support is likely to require systematic changes to organizational policies and administrative support mechanisms. Such systematic changes will require continuous improvement that involves evaluating mechanisms that are in place, driving change to streamline systems and create lasting change, and collecting feedback from officers. A formal mechanism for this process may be highly desirable.

3. IMPROVE CONSISTENCY IN THE APPLICATION OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

One final theme, closely related to the first two, was an overall lack of consistency in the application of policies and practices throughout the organization. Because of the diverse array of assignments, geographic locations, and operational needs which NOAA Corps Officers encounter, perfect consistency is not realistic. However, comments from this survey suggest that room for improvement exists in many areas. For example, some officers indicated they had commands which were highly supportive of using leave and liberty, whereas others had commands which strictly forbid it during the field season. Other comments noted a disparity between the workloads of different assignments and differences in the utilization of leave and liberty between the NOAA Corps and other services.

Consistency can be achieved by adopting new policies or by implementing “best practices” and establishing “cultural norms.” Strict policies are more likely to be followed, but can also reduce operational flexibility and undermine discretion granted to individual commands. In some situations, such as introducing quality of life flights, a formal policy may be appropriate. In other situations, such as promoting the use of special liberty, establishing “best practices” may be more effective and practical.

Regardless of the approach is used in different situations, more consistent application of policies and practices should lead to improved work-life balance by ensuring that officers are treated fairly and that systems in place for creating sustainable work-life balance are utilized effectively.

B. ACTIONABLE SOLUTIONS

The SWG has identified tactical solutions in four main areas to attain the strategic goals listed above:

1. Provide supervisors with training, recommendations, and incentives for improving work-life balance of junior officers
2. Provide more guidance on the use of special liberty
3. Improve augmentation system, explore rotational assignments, and increase staffing
4. Create a pipeline for providing feedback on and improving various administrative services

Specific tactics provided herein are intended to be illustrative, but are not exhaustive. Specific policies will need to be tailored based on organizational capabilities and operational needs through continued dialog between junior and senior officers.

1. PROVIDE SUPERVISORS WITH TRAINING, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND INCENTIVES FOR IMPROVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF JUNIOR OFFICERS

Providing training, recommendations, and incentives for supervisors (especially COs and XO in operational assignments) would create a solid foundation for implementing work-life balance initiatives and for promoting a culture which values work-life balance. This process may be closely connected to Total Worker Health, Behavioral Health and Wellness program, and Fatigue at Sea Initiatives, which are maturing as of the time of this writing. Steps for providing these measures may include:

- ☐ Provide training on the importance and benefits of supporting healthy work-life balance
- ☐ Provide specific recommendations for how to improve work-life balance, especially during operational assignments. Example suggestions from the survey include:
 - ☐ Utilize alternative watch schedules whenever possible to allow for more regular sleep (for example, 4-4-4-12, instead of 4-8-4-8)
 - ☐ Allow officers to have “personal time” of nominally 1-2 hours per day in operational environments
 - ☐ Allow officers to exercise during working hours (must review for consistency with other services)
 - ☐ Schedule “Holiday routine” one or two days per week when underway (officers are generally absolved of non-essential duties)
 - ☐ Grant liberty when in port
 - ☐ Support collaborative scheduling to allow junior officers to help decide flight/watch schedules
- ☐ Incentivize work-life balance initiatives
 - ☐ Encourage supervisors to detail their actions in performance reviews/OERs. (Specifically, utilize the “Looking Out For Others” section of OERs)
 - ☐ Implement 360° feedback mechanisms where appropriate

2. PROVIDE MORE GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF LIBERTY

The use of liberty was a predominant topic in survey comments as it was mentioned at least 46 times. Data from questions on liberty and leave and comments throughout the survey suggest that the use of liberty is inconsistent with that of other services (esp. the Coast Guard) and inconsistent between commands/assignments. Providing better guidance on when officers ought to be given liberty would help to establish cultural norms and reduce these inconsistencies. Guidance may be especially helpful to civilian supervisors who are unaccustomed to norms and practices of uniformed services. Open discussion of how to engage in discussion with wage mariners about perceived imbalances when officers are granted liberty may also be helpful.

The following comment from the survey illustrates many of these points:

"Supervisors could use some guidance from CPC on what's considered normal/appropriate use of liberty & special liberty. The other services use this much more frequently than the NOAA Corps does, I think in large part because we're surrounded by different personnel systems that explicitly provide "comp time" rather than "liberty". It seems even senior NOAA Corps Officers are reluctant to provide any liberty, as they're not sure what's on par with other services. It would be good to put together some research on what's normal for other services, and share expectations for this across the Corps. For example, a Captain at PACOM said they let their whole command know in advance if liberty would be granted on the day after Thanksgiving so people could make plans. It would be nice to have some consistency on days like that across the Corps, even if it's just general guidance given to supervisors who can then choose what's appropriate for their circumstances. If no one knows what's normal, then asking for a day of liberty even after being deployed for 90 days straight sounds can sound like an unreasonable request, especially to a civilian supervisor who's never heard of liberty, and might not understand that our leave system also charges weekends and holidays when used, unlike the civilian system."

Command discretion is imperative in the granting of special liberty, thus guidance and suggestions are likely preferable to any strict policy. Steps to improve the use of special liberty may include:

- ☐ Research best practices and use of liberty in other services (esp. Coast Guard)
- ☐ Revisit the NOAA Corps' liberty policy and ensure it is consistent with other services. (As required by NOAA Corps Directive Chapter 6, Part 1 - 06101)
- ☐ Provide more specific guidance to COs, XOs, supervisors on when liberty is acceptable. For example, give JOs x days of liberty after operational periods where officers worked weekends, y days after a field season, or around certain holiday periods.

3. IMPROVE AUGMENTATION SYSTEM, EXPLORE ROTATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS, AND INCREASE STAFFING

Improvements to the augmentation system and options for rotational assignments were frequently mentioned by sea-going officers. Increases in staffing were mentioned more (proportionally) by aviators, but also mentioned by seagoing officers. Changes in these areas are likely to improve work-life balance by providing the organizational means for officers to receive adequate rest during field seasons and operational assignments. A more robust augmentation system is also likely to reduce the imbalance between operational and land assignments which was evident in survey responses.

The following comments from the survey illustrate some of these points:

"We always seem to be working with a minimum amount of officers. When one has a major life/family event, it is very disruptive to allow that officer to take some time to take care of it. To fix this, I feel like there needs to be an increased number of sea-going officers and a rotating style manning of our ships to allow for a better quality of life and essentially higher utilization of our fleet."

One of the major hurdles in allowing seagoing officers to take legs of the field season off is that they are often forced to use large portions of leave. Having a more formal augmentation system or rotational billets would make it possible and more acceptable for officers to take some leave during a leg off, but also work some from a port office or other location to prevent using most or all of their earned leave. Increasing staffing at marine centers would also offer opportunities for shore side support to assist with collateral duties and reduce workloads for officers at sea. The following comment from the survey provides one example of how a rotational style of manning could work:

"Having more JOs assigned to the ship and have a rotation of when JOs go to sea. Say 4 ENSs assigned to SE. 3 would sail on a 30 day leg, one would be the land support officer. Allow this officer to help out the ship by shipping mail, ordering items, just overall helping out the ship. That officer would work office hours, get a few extra days of liberty and allowed to take leave. For the next 30 day leg the first support officer would go to sea and another would become a support officer. This will also keep more experienced OODs around for longer."

Rotational manning and frequent augmentation are two different styles to this solution, which may each be preferable depending on factors such as vessel scheduling and geographic location. Both styles should be explored where they are most suitable.

Specific suggestions from Junior Officers which may be implemented include:

- ☐ Improve the augmentation system
 - ☐ Require or incentivize more frequent augmentation
 - ☐ Streamline process for requesting augmenters/augmentation opportunities
- ☐ Increase the use of rotational assignments
 - ☐ Add billets to MOCs/AOCs
 - ☐ Improve ability of shore side officers to complete collateral duties for ships
- ☐ Enable officers to work remotely (from port offices, etc.) in order to take legs off without being forced to use an entire block of leave
- ☐ Increase overall staffing levels

4. CREATE A PIPELINE FOR PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON AND IMPROVING VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Comments and data indicate that improvements to administrative and support services are likely to improve work-life balance a great deal. As of the time of this writing, actions are being taken at CPC to introduce beneficial changes. However, improving the wide array of services mentioned in this survey will require a system of continuous improvement to identify and solve problems. Surveys such as this one are helpful for collecting data and gauging the pulse of the organization, but they require a great deal of energy and momentum to carry out.

A pipeline for providing feedback and improving services would be highly beneficial. Such a system may include one or all of the following components:

- ☐ Online portal or tool (using Google Forms or other system) for evaluating services and making suggestions (Several officers noted that they did not feel comfortable resolving certain issues through their chain of command. An option for anonymous submission may be another avenue for officers to reach out and resolve problems.)
- ☐ Officer at CPC dedicated to collecting feedback and driving positive changes
- ☐ Regular meetings and/or video conferences between junior officers, senior leadership, and CPC to discuss priorities and initiatives

Specific suggestions for administrative and support issues which were mentioned in the survey are listed below. They range from large to small in scope.

- ☐ Introduce quality of life flights for officers
- ☐ Create ombudsman billet(s) at CPC or geographically strategic locations to assist with issues such as locating housing, career support for spouses, child care, and other family support.
- ☐ Improve access to counselling services (mental health, marriage, etc.)
- ☐ Allow more permissive PCS policies
- ☐ Consider of using different 'all hands' emails, so officers (and wage mariners) underway are not privy to the info that employees ashore are granted 59 minutes early release
- ☐ Create a policy on family cruises
- ☐ Allow proceed time after BOTC
- ☐ Resolve various payroll and leave processing issues
- ☐ Ensure length of paternity leave is consistent with other services and congressional allowances

V. CONCLUSION

A. NEXT STEPS

The Survey Working group hopes that Junior Officers can work with leadership in the coming weeks and months to develop an Implementation Plan for the strategic goals and solutions detailed in this paper. An Implementation Plan will help to identify priorities as well as specific working groups, costs, timelines, and deliverables.

The NOAA Junior Officer Advisory Committee is expected to be the primary point of contact for collaboration on an Implementation Plan with leadership and other subject experts. Once an Implementation Plan is drafted it can be fortified by an action memo to proceed if desired.

VI. RECOGNITION

A. CONTRIBUTIONS

This survey was created and organized by the NJAC Survey Working Group:

LT Daniel Langis
LT Michael Silagi
LT Erick Gomez
LT Jesse Milton
LT Nikolai Pawlenko
LT Stephen Moulton
LT Steven Wall
LT Lyndsey Davis
LTJG Dustin Picard
LTJG Diane Perry
LTJG John Katchenago
LTJG Laura Rock
LTJG Melissa Mathes

A special thanks to those who worked on the White Paper and presentation to Leadership:

LT Daniel Langis
LT Michael Silagi
LT Jesse Milton
LTJG Dustin Picard
LTJG Diane Perry

We would like to thank senior leadership, including RADM Silah, CAPT Brakob, and CDR Rathke, for their support of work-life balance initiatives and open communication throughout the process of creating, distributing, and analyzing this survey.