Research Product 86-30

Plan for Research on Army Families

Personnel Utilization Technical Area

Manpower and Personnel Research Laboratory

September 1986

U. S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences

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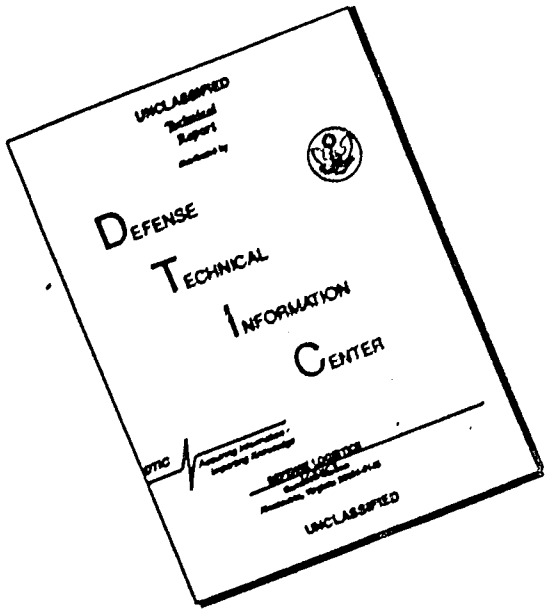

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This report is a summary of the work of a panel consisting of Mady Wechsler Segal, Gary L. Bowen, Gerald M. Croan, Barbara Pate Glacel, Dennis K. Orthner, and David R. Segal. The panel was convened to assist the Army Research Institute in planning its research on Army families. This report is an overview and synthesis of the panel's writing, deliberations, and conclusions.

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Plan for Research on Army Families

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Manpower and Personnel

The Army Family Action Plans for 1984, 1985, and 1986, signed by the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), specifically charge the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) to conduct studies that promote the following objectives: provide demographic data, describe the relationship between Army families and soldier retention, describe the relationship between family factors and soldier/unit readiness, foster a sense of community and partnership (among Army families), and promote family wellness.

As part of ARI's effort to meet these goals, a panel of nationally recognized experts in the field of military families was convened to discuss what was known about military families, what research was needed, and what efforts--responsive to the CSA's charter--would be most likely to produce a demonstrable payoff to the Army over a 5-year period. This report includes the discussions of that panel and the draft reports prepared by panel members.

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PLAN FOR RESEARCH ON ARMY FAMILIES

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PLAN FOR RESEARCH ON ARMY FAMILIES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to describe problems and issues concerning Army families that need to be addressed by research. A general conceptual model of the Army-family system is presented as a vehicle both for identifying specific research questions and for emphasizing the systemic context within which these questions must be viewed.

At the center of our concern is the relationship between the Army and the family as social institutions. A social institution is a set of interrelated social norms and roles governing behavior in some area of social life. The Army and family institutions intersect with each other; that is, each has impacts upon the other. The relationship between these two institutions can be characterized along a dimension ranging from conflict to cooperation. As articulated in The Army Family White Paper of 1983, the Army's Family Philosophy has as its central ideal the building of cooperation at the inter-institutional interface:

> A partnership exists between the Army and Army Families. The Army's unique missions, concept of service and lifestyle of its members - all affect the nature of this partnership. Towards the goal of building a strong partnership, the Army remains committed to assuring adequate support to families to promote wellness; develop a sense of community; and strengthen the mutually reinforcing bonds between the Army and its families.

This Army statement includes a concern for family "wellness," which can be seen as distinct from the family's relationship to the Army (i.e., families can be both relatively independent of the Army and healthy). However, most of the concern is with cooperation between the Army and the families of its personnel. Such cooperation can contribute to family wellness, to retention of trained personnel, and to the readiness and effectiveness of the Army.

This goal of inter-institutional cooperation and sense of partnership is the cornerstone of the conceptual model and research agenda presented here.

At the cooperation pole of the dimension of cooperation-conflict, the relationship between the Army organization and the family would be characterized as one of mutual adaptation, interdependence, system integration, mutual support, shared purpose, and mutual commitment. That is, cooperation exists when both the Army and the family make changes in order to accomodate to the demands and needs of the other. Optimally, the Army and the family respond to each other without impairing their own abilities to function. The other pole of the Army-family relationship would be characterized by competition, strain, interference, and conflict. Under these conditions, the demands of each interfere with the ability of the other to function effectively.

The 1980s represent a new era in the attention given to families of military personnel, by both policy makers and researchers. A number of factors have converged to cause this new focus of attention. Some of these are specifically military changes; others are general societal trends in family patterns that have affected the military. All have made the mutual adaptation of the military and family institutions more problematic. The current state and future directions of research, knowledge, and policy regarding military families can only be understood within the context of these trends. These trends include the transformation to a large standing Army, increased numbers of married personnel, a volunteer force, and general societal changes in family patterns and gender roles.

The Changing Nature of the Force

Since World War II, the Army has moved from a small standing peacetime force, which grows in response to mobilization for war, to a large standing peacetime Army. This transformation is due to the development of atomic and then nuclear weapons, the development of aerial delivery systems for these

weapons, and the evolution of a bipolar world, all of which have denied America the luxuries of time and distance from the battlefield to mobilize for the next major war. A large standing military force is also necessitated by the prevalence of "low intensity" conflicts all around the globe, and the need to respond quickly to such conflicts.

The very size and nature of the standing force has implications for Army families. For example, maintenance of a large and heterogeneous peacetime force has contributed, along with other factors, to a loss of a sense of community and informal networks of supportive social relationships. This loss of informal community supports has necessitated the provision of formal support services, a phenomenon noted more than twenty years ago by Coates and Pellegrin. Further, the large size of the force means that there are now large numbers of service members and family members who potentially require assistance from formal services.

The military historically has been the province of single men, especially among junior enlisted personnel who have generally made up the bulk of American armed forces in time of mobilization. Although some officers and senior non-commissioned officers in the past were married, low-ranking enlisted men were prohibited or at least strongly discouraged from getting married while in the service. A standing Army has a larger proportion of career personnel, who are further along in their own life cycles, than does a mobilization Army. Modern military technology requires higher levels of technical training of enlisted personnel than previously, which in turn requires retaining them in the force longer to realize a return to the investment in training. The longer they remain in service, the more likely they are to be married. A majority of the service members in today's Army are married and, at any given age, soldiers are more likely to be married than

their civilian counterparts. Although the rates of marriage are lower among junior enlisted personnel than other ranks, marriage has greater consequences for the lifestyle of young soldiers. For example, they do not live in the barracks nor are they eligible for family housing on post, so they live off post, which draws their lives away from the Army.

The move from a conscripted to a volunteer armed force has implications for the dynamics of Army-family relationships. Under a draft system with a small selection ratio from among those eligible, exemptions for family considerations were possible. A volunteer system, especially under conditions of declining cohort size, precludes this option. Further, the retention of trained career personnel requires attention to family needs. If family members are dissatisfied with Army life, the service member is more likely to return to civilian life.

Societal Changes in Family Patterns and Gender Roles

There are a variety of general societal trends which are affecting military families. Most notable are the variety of patterns of family configurations and changes in gender role norms and behaviors. The family pattern that has served as the cultural ideal in the U.S. since the end of World War II now characterizes only a minority of American families. The ideal family was seen as consisting of a husband who worked outside of the home, a wife who was a full-time housewife, and their children. Marriages were expected to last until the death of one of the spouses. If the husband/father needed to move to advance his career, his wife and children were expected to accompany him. The wife's identity was derived primarily from her familial roles.

Today, a majority of American women, including those with husbands and children, work outside the home for pay. A wife's sense of identity is now less dependent on her family roles and women expect to be treated as more than

appendages to their husbands. An increasing number of men are taking greater interest in their family roles, including more responsibility for parenting.

High divorce rates and freer standards of sexual behavior have led to a variety of household configurations. There have been sharp increases over the past fifteen to twenty years in the number of one-parent families with minor children, as well as couples living together without being married.

These societal trends in family patterns and gender roles have had, and are continuing to have, strong impacts on the nature of work and family life in American society and on the relationship between the work and family institutions. The military is a reflection of its host civilian society. Recent years have seen a substantial increase in the number and proportion of women in the military, in the number of dual career and dual service couples, and in the number of single parents. The influence of societal trends on the Army is even greater than the influence on civilian work institutions. The nature of the Army mission, and the way that organizational policies have developed in response to that mission, have produced a pattern of demands on soldiers and their families that is different from the demands and lifestyles of nonmilitary families. The intersection of this unique pattern of lifestyle demands with these general societal changes in family patterns and gender roles has necessitated greater attention to family issues within the Army.

Research and Policy Attention to Military Families

Research on military families has increased substantially in the past five to ten years. The Military Family Resource Center's review of the literature reports that "83% of the literature and research on military families was published in the last decade." Much of the earlier empirical literature tended to focus on families with problems, either those who came to clinical services for help or those in special problem circumstances, such as

the families of prisoners of war. Research samples tended to be small and non-representative (i.e., not selected randomly from a known population). The use of larger samples and an interest in the typical experiences of military family members have become more common recently. On the whole, except for certain specific issues, the cumulative knowledge derived from research on military families has not been extensive.

Paralleling the research activity is policy attention to military families, including Army families. There has been pressure exerted on the Army by family members themselves, as is evident in such occurrences as the volunteer-organized first Army Family Symposium in 1980. Attention by policy makers in the Department of the Army is evidenced in many ways, including official support of the second and third Army Family Symposia, the establishment of the Family Liaison Office, the development and dissemination of the Army Family White Paper and the Army Family Action Plan (I and II) with specific actions addressed to problem resolution. There have been many activities and new programs in support of Army families at the installation and unit levels in recent years. Congressional concern for, and funding of programs for, military families have also increased.

All of this increase in attention to Army families has not been without its problems. A serious problem, and one noted in the White Paper, is that the proliferation of programs has been on a piecemeal basis. This is normal and understandable in light of the rapid social changes and the need to respond to problems, with responses coming from different organizational levels and components as problems and symptoms of problems have been identified. The emphasis now is on carefully planning and coordinating policies and programs affecting Army families, including an emphasis on preventing family problems before they occur, rather than waiting for symptoms of distress to appear.

Accomplishing these goals requires attention to the entire Army-family system and substantial research information. Effective maintenance of, and improvement in, a strong Army-family partnership requires that program and policy planning be based on more knowledge than currently exists about what will be effective. The gaps in our knowledge in some areas are great; in others, usable knowledge will be greatly increased with relatively small research efforts. All of the research efforts require that the Army-family system be approached from a total system view, with recognition of all of the components of the system. To be productive and cumulative, specific research projects and specific policy initiatives must consider this entire system. To that end, a system model of the relationship between the Army institution and the family institution is presented below and research questions are generated from this conceptual framework.

THE ARMY-FAMILY SYSTEM

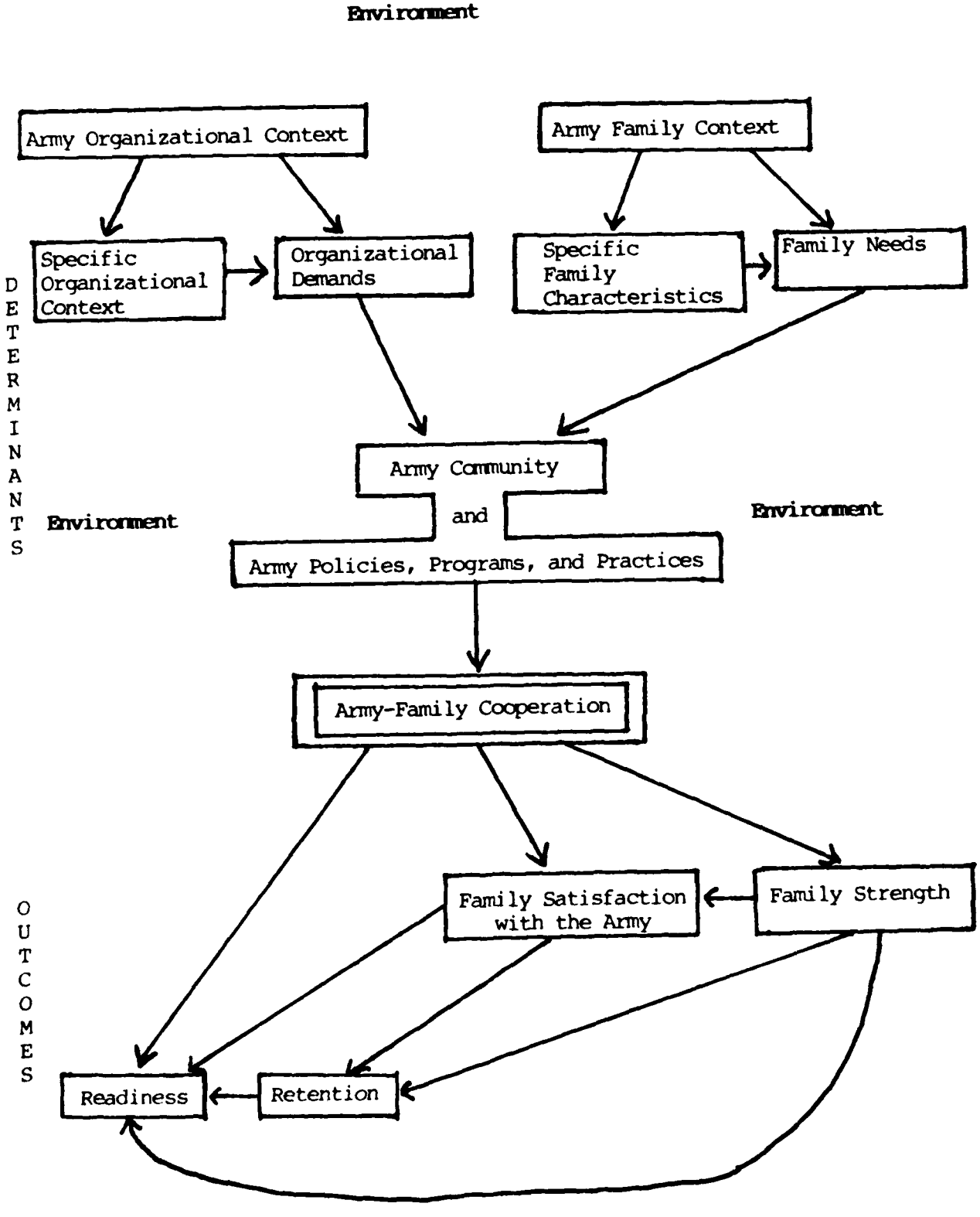
Introduction

This section presents a conceptual framework for analyzing the Army-family system. The model is represented in Figure 1. It is important to recognize that this model is an abstract simplification of a complex set of interacting variables and processes. These processes operate at a variety of organizational, group, interpersonal and individual levels. Not all of the likely causal connections are drawn, and not all of the relevant specific variables are included. The linkages that are drawn are those that are most pertinent to understanding the mutual adaptation of the Army and the family. Specifically excluded are those relationships that involve either the Army or the family without the other. The following section (RESEARCH AGENDA) describes the research that is needed to better understand the specific dynamics and strengths of the relationships among elements in the system. A special research emphasis must be placed on understanding the effects of those factors over which the Army (at various levels of organizational units) has some control.

In this section each component of the conceptual model is defined and described. This section is organized as follows. The discussion begins with the central linkage within the system, the element called "Army-Family Cooperation"; next we will consider the expected outcomes of that cooperation; finally we will describe the likely determinants of that cooperation, with special emphasis on those over which the Army has some degree of control.

FIGURE 1

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE ARMY-FAMILY SYSTEM



Army-Family Cooperation

As discussed above, the central intersection of the Army and the family can be characterized on a continuum from cooperation to competition and conflict. The stated high level policy goal in the Army is to strive for a sense of mutual support, adaptation, commitment, and shared purpose with the families of its personnel. Recognizing that competition with the family for the dedication, loyalty, and commitment of the service member will operate to the detriment of mission accomplishment, Army leaders are seeking to integrate the family with the Army institution. This concept of system integration is an abstract one, but it is possible to operationalize it concretely. The optimum level and type of cooperation and mutual involvement of the Army and the family is not known. It is a question for research, and one that is at least partially answerable in terms of the outcomes of various levels of cooperation.

An important aspect of Army-family cooperation is the degree to which service members and their families understand and are committed to the Army's organizational missions, goals, and practices, and show that support through their participation in Army activities. Similarly important is the degree to which Army leaders (again at various organizational levels) understand and are committed to addressing family needs, and show their support through their policies, programs, and practices.

Outcomes

The model posits that the principal outcomes of Army-family cooperation are, for the Army, readiness and retention and, for the family, satisfaction with the Army and family strength. Each of these four outcome components is described below.

Readiness

Readiness is recognized as a primary organizational goal, though there is no general consensus on precisely what constitutes readiness and how it should be measured. Official measures of readiness tend to be counts of equipment and personnel. It is also recognized that there are important dimensions of readiness that, though more qualitative and less tangible, can still be measured and quantified. Some of the components of readiness at the unit and individual levels are: mobilization (availability and willingness to mobilize, availability for deployments and overseas assignments), combat effectiveness (including willingness to assume risks, performance in combat situations), productivity (including attentiveness, safety, motivation, willingness to work extra hours, low absenteeism), assignment availability (willingness to accept specific assignments such as command positions or overseas tour extensions), and morale.

Retention

In order to accomplish its mission, the Army must optimize its retention of qualified and trained personnel. Components of retention are completions of obligated terms of service, reenlistment, and career intention. While a great deal of turnover is expected, especially among enlisted personnel at the end of their first term, it is essential that the Army retain some to their second term and retain large proportions of its most highly trained and experienced personnel, including mid-career officers and NCOs. The costs of replacing these people are very high, both in terms of fiscal expenditure and readiness for battle. This is particularly true in technical fields where training costs are high and competition for talent with the private sector is most severe.

Family Satisfaction with the Army

Included here are family members' attitudes toward the Army and toward the specific aspects of their lifestyle, as well as their feelings about the service member remaining in the Army. These attitudes are expected to be affected, among other factors, by the extent to which the service member and his/her family perceive Army-family cooperation. Also included in this element of the model is the degree to which the relationship between the Army and the family meets the expectations and desires of the family. Thus, if the family desires a high level of involvement with the Army institution and has that involvement or if they desire minimal contact with the Army and have that, they will be relatively satisfied, i.e., relative to those who desire integration and are segregated or those who desire segregation and are integrated.

Family Strength

An important outcome of Army-family cooperation should be enhanced family strength. However, it is not firmly established what constitutes family strength. It is generally seen as the degree to which the family fulfills its functions for its members. It is likely to be a composite of several important family characteristics. One of these is the degree to which the collective and individual needs of the family and its members are satisfied. Another is the degree of stability of the family unit. Further, family strength includes the ability of the family to adapt and to cope with life stresses. Family strength includes dimensions of "family wellness," in that strong families would be characterized by a collective social and psychological health and the absence of behavioral problems. Family strength components include family system resources (e.g., supportive communication, cohesion, adaptability), family satisfaction (well-being, lack of distess), and stability. Distinctions can be made among these various components of

family strength; these distinctions should be specified and preserved in research.

Determinants

Factors which affect Army-family cooperation, directly or indirectly, include: the environment, general Army organizational context, specific organizational context, organizational demands, Army family context, specific family characteristics, family needs, Army community, and Army policies, programs, and practices. Each of these components of the model is discussed below.

Environment

The environment for the Army-family system is civilian society, both in general and in terms of the specific location. Obviously, this environment is multi-faceted and complex. General environmental factors include societal work and family values, expectations, and patterns; and public opinion and legislative actions regarding the military and families. Among the most relevant aspects of specific locations are: culture (including whether the specific location is U.S. or foreign); the rural-urban nature of the location; employment and labor market characteristics; transportation; housing; education; and political characteristics.

Army Organizational Context

The general Army organizational context includes, among other factors, the size of the Army, its rank distribution, the conscript or volunteer nature of accession policies, the ratio of combat to support personnel, the distribution of training required for billets, and the distribution of where personnel are stationed, both in terms of types of locations (e.g., overseas) and specific installations. This context is, at any one time, a constant across all organizational units and families, but varies from one time to the

next and has important influences on the nature of the organization's demands on its personnel.

Specific Organizational Context

This element refers to the organizational location of a service member. It includes installation, rank, unit, military occupational specialty (MOS), and specific job assignment (billet). Also included here are certain Army experiences of the service member, such as number of years of service, previous billets and training, etc.

Organizational Demands

The unique pattern of demands that the military organization makes on its members, and directly or indirectly on their spouses and children, distinguishes the military institution from other work institutions. While other jobs involve some of these same demands, no other occupation has the same collection of such demands. These organizational demands include: risk of injury or death; relocation; long duty hours; short absences from home and family (e.g., deployments, field training, temporary duty, short-term school assignments); long absences from home and family (long-term deployments, unaccompanied tours, accompanied tours that family chooses not to go on); residence in foreign countries; work of a security-classified nature (preventing discussing work with spouse); strong behavioral prescriptions based on a hierarchical rank structure; and normative pressures regarding the behavior of spouse and children.

Army Family Context

The Army family context refers to cultural and structural patterns of Army families. These factors include: norms regarding family life; gender role norms and behaviors; and occupations and labor force participation rates of spouses. They also include the distribution of Army families on the specific family context variables defined below.

Specific Family Characteristics

Specific family characteristics refer to the characteristics of an Army family and its members. They include family life cycle stage and family structure. The relevant variables include: presence of spouse; backgrounds of service member and spouse (e.g., ethnicity, rural-urban, military vs. civilian, region of origin, size of family of orientation, social class); number and ages of children; length of experience with the Army; education of service member and spouse; occupational training, occupational preferences, and career and employment motivation of spouse; and location of residence relative to Army installation and extended family. Certain family configurations deserve special attention because of their likely effects on important elements in the Army-family system. These include: families with a female service member; dual service couples; dual career couples; sole parent families; bicultural families; reconstituted families; families with a dependent adult relative, living in the household or elsewhere; and families with a member with special needs ("exceptional family member").

Family Needs

The "Family Needs" component of the Army-family system is a composite of a number of important dimensions and must be a major focus of research. It includes the physical, psychological, social, and economic needs of the family and its members. Physical needs include needs for safety, health, nutrition, and freedom from abuse. Psychological needs include needs for personal identity, psychological growth and development, and education for the service member and his/her spouse and children. Clearly, for some spouses, this would involve paid employment and/or career progression; it may also involve the opportunity to volunteer one's services and be recognized for that. The social dimension involves a sense of community, a feeling of belonging to a

social group and a sense of mattering to others; it includes friendship and informal social support; it also includes companionship with one's spouse. The economic dimension involves the attainment of a standard of living and specific aspects of that standard of living (e.g., housing, food, clothing, consumer items) that fulfills the needs and expectations of the family members.

Army Community

The Army community refers primarily to the network of informal social relationships available to the family through the Army. The locus of this community can be at several levels: the entire Army, the installation, the neighborhood on post, and the organizational unit of the service member (at various levels). In addition to structure, the Army community has cultural components, which include Army traditions, norms, expectations, language, etc. Like the structure of community, culture operates at several levels.

Army Policies, Programs, and Practices

This is the last element of the model to be described. It is discussed last because it is the component over which the Army has the greatest control. It is the locus of recommended changes in the system. Research will be expected to produce information and recommendations to guide Army policy makers in making changes.

This element in the model has three major categories. The first consists of the policies and practices governing the demands made by the Army on service members and their families. Examples of those with particular impacts on families include: tour lengths; relocation notice; housing eligibility policies; timing and control of unaccompanied tours; quarters clearance procedures. The second category consists of programs designed to support families and help them adjust to the organizational demands. It encompasses programs that are Army-wide, installation-specific, and unit-specific. (Just

a few examples are Army Community Services, sponsor programs, community representation systems, welcoming and orientation programs, family support groups, counseling programs, and spouse employment programs.) This category includes variables affecting the specific operation of the programs, as well as the relationships (e.g., communication and coordination) among the three organizational levels. The third category in this element of the model involves broad Army policies that have likely impacts on families, but are not specifically included in the previous two categories; most notable here would be pay and benefits.

The fulfillment of Army families' needs is often made problematic because of the organization's demands and the way that they are carried out. Thus, to maintain Army-family cooperation, to increase readiness and retention, and to increase the family's ability to fulfill family needs, intervention is necessary. The focus of the interventions, while still located within this element of Army policies, programs, and practices, can be to change the organizational demands, to change the family, or to provide a buffer for the family. That is, when organizational demands and family needs are conflicting, two types of responses are possible. One is to reduce the demands the organization makes on the service member and his/her family or change policies affecting the way these demands operate; that is, the organization can adapt. The other response is to increase services to families to help them cope with the demands; that is, the family can adapt with organizational help. Both of these types of policy and program responses require attention.

RESEARCH AGENDA

Introduction

This section describes the types of research questions that need to be addressed in order to determine how to maximize Army-family cooperation, while at the same time fulfilling both organizational and family needs. Such research needs to be performed with consideration of the entire system. The discussion of the research agenda is organized around selected specific elements of the conceptual model. Each section is labelled with the element which is the primary locus of the research questions. However, like the research that is needed, the discussion draws on the entire model, either implicitly or explicitly. The objective of research on Army families is to better understand the relationships outlined in the model, with the ultimate goal of helping the Army to increase family strength, retention, and readiness. Thus, these outcome variables are among the foci of discussion.

This section begins with a discussion of the research questions related to family needs and family strength, broadly defined. Then research is suggested on Army family context and specific family characteristics, followed by a discussion of research questions about retention and, finally, readiness. Throughout this discussion, it is important to bear in mind that the major objective of the research is to provide information that is useful to modifying Army policies, programs, and practices. Research information is needed to guide the development and implementation of new interventions. Research must also determine how extant policies, programs, and practices interact with other determinants in producing various outcomes. Thus, in this section, regardless of the specific element that is the focus, Army policies, programs, and practices are considered.

Family Needs and Family Strength

The degree of fulfillment of individual and family needs within the Army lifestyle is likely to affect family satisfaction with the Army and to have important organizational consequences, such as morale, motivation, performance, and retention. (Research specifically designed to examine these relationships is described later, under "Retention" and "Readiness".) A major focus of research on Army families derives from these organizational outcomes, as well as from concern for the well-being of Army personnel and their families. Research must center on determining the degree to which Army families are able to fulfill the needs of their members and especially on the processes by which organizational practices affect the likelihood of this fulfillment. Special attention must be given to understanding the degree to which demands with negative impacts on families are actually required by the needs of the organization, how demands can be softened through policy changes without decreasing mission readiness, and what Army programs help to buffer the potential negative impacts of the organization's demands on service members and their families, either through changing the family to be more adaptive or by providing some substitute source of family strength. A few of the most important areas of research will be highlighted in this section. It must be recognized that this is by no means an exhaustive treatment of the questions to be addressed by research; rather it is only a small sample intended to provide a sense of the range of questions requiring research attention.

Defining Family Strength and Identifying Its Determinants

One task of research is to identify what constitutes family strength and family wellness. Family strength has been defined above as the degree to which the family fulfills its functions for its members, with a number of components of family strength specified. However, this is not a consensual

definition and conceptualization. Conceptual and empirical distinctions should be drawn among characterizations of families as "strong", as "well" or "healthy", as "adaptive", and as "stable"; such distinctions should be preserved and explored in the research. Such a multidimensional concept approach should provide information that is the most useful for program planning and the most adaptable for specific purposes. The rest of the discussion below uses the term family strength to refer to the general concept.

Research is needed to identify what distinguishes those Army families that are strong from those that have problems functioning and meeting members' needs. Research needs to determine how strong families differ from others in a variety of factors, including: their sense of cooperation with the Army; the characteristics of their members; the relationships among their members (e.g., communication patterns); the strategies they use to adapt to specific organizational stressors; their relationships to various segments of the Army community and other social networks; and, most especially, their experiences with the Army organization, including how Army policies and programs have affected their experiences of the organizational demands.

The nature, timing, frequency, and implementation of the organizational demands vary as a function of the general organizational context and the specific organizational context. Research needs to be directed toward documenting these aspects of the demands and their impacts on family strength and satisfaction with the Army. We need objective and subjective information on the experiences of service members and their families with regard to the demands. How often and under what conditions do they experience these demands? How are they affected by the general Army organizational context and the specific organizational context of the service member? What perceptions

do service members and their families have about the necessity of the demands and under what conditions?

All of this research must consider how the specific organizational context and specific family characteristic interact to affect family strength. Not all families are affected the same way by the same organizational demand. To intervene to help families requires understanding of these dynamics. For example, does separation early in a marriage and/or when children are young have more negative consequences on family functioning than when the marital relationship is more established and children are older? What mechanisms in young families are successful in maintaining family strength despite such separation? What are the special consequences of separation and relocation on adolescent children? How are all of these potential consequences affected by the integration of the family into a network of supportive social relationships? To what extent does frequent and intimate communication during separation alleviate the stress of separation for adolescent children? How does the nature of the parent-adolescent relationship and the role of the service member in the family affect the impact of relocation on that relationship and on the psychological development of the adolescent?

Research is needed to determine how the specific organizational context affects family strength and what special Army policies and programs are needed in high risk contexts, that is, where there is relatively high likelihood of problems in meeting family needs. Those organizational contexts that deserve special attention include hazardous duty assignments, high stress jobs (e.g., drill sergeants, unit commanders), units that deploy frequently, and billets where service members and their families are relatively isolated from the Army community (e.g., recruiters).

Spouse Employment

Among the special issues with regard to family needs is spouse employment. Spouse employment is related to economic well-being and to the fulfillment of personal identity needs; it is also related to the establishment of friendship relationships and social support networks, as well as being a determinant of individual well-being. Several aspects of the organizational demands interfere with spouse employment; the extent and nature of the dynamics of this relationship need to be researched. It is known that unemployment and underemployment rates are substantially higher for military wives than for civilian wives. A major factor responsible for this is the demand to relocate frequently. Very little is currently known about the general and specific effects of spouse employment on Army-family cooperation and on family strength. Research is needed to determine the impacts of specific organizational demands on spouse employment and the differential impacts of these demands as a function of specific family characteristics. In addition, research is needed to determine how Army policies and programs can aggravate or mitigate the effects of the demands.

A variety of kinds of information is needed to improve the ability of Army policies and programs to satisfy needs for spouse employment or at least minimize interference with fulfilling this need. For example, to what degree do Army spouses desire and need employment? What is the distribution of Army spouses on employment-relevant characteristics, such as education, occupational training and experience, occupational preferences, and career ambitions? What employment needs do they have at different stages of the life cycle? What additional training or other resources (e.g., child care, transportation) do they require to meet their employment needs while living an Army lifestyle? What is the impact on spouse employment of Army policies governing the organization's demands, e.g., tour length, separation frequency,

and relocation notice and flexibility in response to family needs?

Special research attention needs to be directed to the effects of the environment on spouse employment. For example, in what economic sectors do Army spouses compete and how do they fare compared to their civilian counterparts? What are the labor market dynamics of areas surrounding Army installations? How are wage levels (especially for those jobs which Army spouses are likely to fill) affected by the presence of a military installation? Is there discrimination against military spouses in hiring, training, and advancement? How can the military community influence the host civilian community?

A variety of approaches might be taken to address spouse employment needs. These approaches can include, among others, actions by the Army to work with local civilian employers, perform job referral or contract with a civilian employment service, change Army civilian hiring policies, provide training for spouses, change tour lengths, or determine relocation assignments on the basis of joint career decision-making. Research is needed to determine the likely success of these various approaches and how the success would vary as a function of aspects of the specific family context, the specific organizational context, and the environment.

Social Needs

Research must also focus on the social needs of service members and their families. Among the likely social needs of most families is a sense of community, opportunities for friendship and social support, and companionship with one's spouse. Fulfillment of these needs is more problematic for Army families than for civilian families, due to the organizational demands. Army families are often away from the usual sources of community and social support: their homes of origin, extended families, and long-term friends.

Frequent relocation makes Army communities transient and families must repeatedly adjust to new places. When service members are away because of their Army duties, their spouses are more dependent on the local community for companionship and social support.

A variety of Army programs that have been developed at various levels are aimed at enhancing sense of community and social support, both on-post and off-post. There are programs at the installation level, in particular neighborhoods, and in Army units of varying size. Research is needed to determine which programs and types of programs are most effective in meeting the needs of Army families and how effectiveness differs as a function of the specific family characteristics.

Research should be directed not only to formal community programs but also to the informal Army community at various levels. Previous research, on both civilian and military populations, shows the importance of informal support networks in alleviating stress and stress-related problems. We need to determine the various forms that informal support might take, and the factors that differentiate communities that tend to meet family needs from those that do not. Special attention needs to be given to identifying factors that are within the power of the Army to change.

If informal sense of community is low, then the formal systems of support are more important. Under this condition, the formal support services can function to provide what the informal networks do not and they can facilitate the development of more supportive informal networks. Research is needed to provide the information to guide the development and implementation of such intervention programs.

Research is also needed on how organizational location, such as membership in a small branch or corps, or some form of home basing (returning to previous assignment locations) affects sense of community.

Needs Assessment and Program Evaluation System

Research is also needed to provide a system for ongoing needs assessment and program evaluation for programs at the Department of the Army level, at the installation level, and at the unit level. Research should provide the tools and methodology for determining the need for specific services, for evaluating the effectiveness of specific programs, for improving the programs, and for deciding which programs need evaluation. Thus, the research task is to develop the system to perform needs assessment and program evaluation, not to evaluate specific programs, unless as a trial and demonstration of the system. As an example, for programs designed to fulfill family social needs, such as need for community, research information can be used to develop systems for measuring community climate that can be used at the appropriate levels.

Research should be directed toward examining the system of delivery to Army families of services intended to help them meet their needs. There is currently a collection of agencies and personnel working on providing various family support services at varous levels of implementation. Research is needed to assess and improve the coordination among the components of this collection. For example, what are the formal and informal lines of communication among the various agencies at the different levels? How do the extant communication and control patterns affect the effectiveness of the policy implementation process? What is the relationship of community programs and informal support networks to unit chains of command? What are the attitudes of chain of command personnel toward family support initiatives?

General Army policies and practices that are not aimed at families can nevertheless have substantial consequences for families. Research can aid in developing the methodology for conducting "family impact analysis." Such

analysis can then be applied to proposed policies to anticipate their likely impacts on Army families.

Family Expectations

Research is needed on family members' expectations regarding the Army and what they expect the Army to do for them and under what conditions. What are their expectations regarding community? How are expectations and experiences affected by the environment? How are expectations affected by the specific organizational context and family characteristics? The spouses of commanders at various levels are a specific target group for research. How much do they want to be involved with community support programs? What kinds of normative pressures do they experience and with what effects?

It must be recognized that the provision of community and other social support services may result in organizational intrusion into the family. It is possible for the Army to do too much to try to involve families. When a variety of Army agencies and groups try to get families involved in Army and Army-related activities, some families may feel that the Army is interfering with their personal lives. Activities for service members and their families that are mandated, either formally or through informal social pressure, may interfere with Army-family cooperation. Thus, the way that families' involvement is obtained, and the perceptions held by soldiers and their spouses of the activities, must be examined to ascertain the effectiveness of support programs.

Research Utilization

Research must also identify the mechanisms by which relevant information from investigations can best inform policy development and implementation processes at various organizational levels. Research findings about how to best serve the needs of Army families must be communicated to those specific agencies and people who are in a position to effect organizational change. To

be useful in improving Army-family cooperation, research knowledge must be transmitted to practitioners. This applies to all areas of research on Army families. Thus, research should examine the processes by which already existing knowlege about Army families is being most effectively communicated and used.

Army Family Context and Specific Family Characteristics

The above discussion of the major research that is needed on Army families should make it clear that precise information that is not routinely available is required on an ongoing basis on a variety of characteristics of Army families. To design programs and policies to enhance Army-family cooperation and to meet the needs of Army families, both researchers and practitioners must have information about the distribution of Army families on the specific family characteristics and the relationships among them. They must also know how Army families compare to other military families and to civilian families on these variables. It is also important for information to be provided on the experiences of Army families with the organizational demands and how these demands intersect with family characteristics. The task for research is to develop a system for the routine provision of demographic data on Army families, as well as to explore in depth some of the relationships among various factors. Further, research should determine if there are identifiable trends with regard to these demographic characteristics. Can we project future patterns and anticipate their implications for Army-family cooperation?

Among the many questions that need to be answered are the following. What proportion of Army personnel are married? How does this vary by age, rank, gender, etc.? What is the distribution of Army personnel on the number and ages of their children and how does this vary by rank, age, gender,

occupation of spouse? What are the divorce rates among Army personnel and how do these vary by the specific family characteristics and the specific organizational context? How often are service members separated from their families because of Army duties and how does this vary by the specific organizational context and family characteristics? What proportion of the time do dual-service couples get joint domicile? When they do not, with whom do their children stay and how is this decision affected by other factors? How many spouses speak English as a second language and how proficient are they in English? What countries do they come from? How often do Army families relocate and how is this related to specific organizational context and family characteristics?

Retention

The Army Family White Paper and Family Action Plan explicitly recognize the importance of family issues for retention. Previous research in the Army and the other military services generally establishes that family factors play an important role in reenlistment and career decisions. Army policy and program managers believe that they need better information on the link between family issues and soldier retention in order to justify allocation of resources to family-oriented programs and policies and to determine which programs and policies are likely to be most effective and for which types of personnel and families. There is a need for detailed information about how retention is affected by the interactions among specific organizational demands, specific family needs, and specific family characteristics.

As just one possible example from among a large variety of combinations, disruptions to spouse career caused by relocation may be a serious problem and

detriment to retention primarily for personnel whose spouses are highly educated, while the availability, quality, and cost of on-post child care may be of greater importance to dual working couples with lower incomes and pre-school children. The service members in the former families may be most likely to be high level, well-educated officers, while the latter may represent a very large number of first-term or second-term enlisted personnel. As another example, separations may pose the greatest stress and result in dissatisfaction with the Army for very young families, especially those with young children or with non-English speaking spouses.

Similarly, there is a need for better information on how policies and programs can best address the family issues most important for retention. Research is needed to determine which approaches are likely to have the greatest impact on fulfilling family needs and on family support for reenlistment or a continuing Army career. For example, research can examine whether the variety of actions that might be taken to address spouse employment needs are likely to have differential impacts on retention. As another example, research is needed to determine which programs and policies prevent or mitigate problems during separations for those families where this is the major concern and detriment to retention.

The role that spouses play in the retention decision-making process needs to be better understood. Spouse support for an Army career is known to be predictive of retention, but little is known about how spouses actually influence reenlistment or separation decisions, and more information is needed about how to enhance spouse support. There is a need to quantify and model the effects of family factors on retention to enable cost-benefit analyses of family policies and programs. Research is needed to determine the relative impact of family factors on retention, as compared to the impact of other factors such as job structure, work environment, compensation, or benefits.

Such research will help to decide whether investments in family programs will have payoffs for the Army in terms of retention that are comparable to those that might result from improvements in the work environment, increases in basic pay, or reenlistment bonuses.

Readiness

It is generally recognized within the Army that there is a positive relationship between family strength, on the one hand, and soldier performance and mission readiness, on the other. This recognition usually takes the form of knowledge that family problems have negative impacts on job performance and readiness. For example, soldiers often have to be left back from deployments or sent home from field exercises due to family difficulties that should not be emergencies. Thus, comparisons have been made only between families with adequate strength to endure deployment and those with inadequate strength. There has been very little research by the Army or the other services that examines directly the linkage between family issues and readiness. Such research might explain how family strength, in its full range, contributes to both individual and unit readiness. Many of the studies that are available suffer from a variety of methodological limitations, including inconsistent definitions of both dependent and independent variables, use of small and non-representative samples, and over-reliance on simple correlations. There is a need for much more information about how family factors affect readiness to guide policy changes and program initiatives.

Research is needed to provide information about which specific aspects of readiness are affected by which specific family issues, and for which specific subpopulations of Army families. Currently little is known about the types of family issues that have the greatest impact on readiness, the relative salience of different issues and impacts for different types of families

(e.g., those at different life stages), and the specific aspects of readiness that are affected. For example, how do spouse employment needs and/or perceived pressures to volunteer affect the willingness of senior officers to accept certain assignments, such as command positions? What types of families are best able to remain strong and fulfill family needs during overseas assignments? How often are family members (with or without the service member) sent home early from overseas assignments due to failures of the family to adapt? What proportions of sick time and AWOL incidents are due to problems in fulfilling family needs (e.g., children's illness, fights with a spouse, spouse loneliness)? How does the incidence of readiness-related outcomes vary by the specific family context (e.g., young marriages, single parents, families far from relatives)?

There is a need to identify specific family-oriented policies and programs that are likely to have the greatest impact on readiness-related outcomes. From information of the kind just described about the relationship between specific family issues and specific readiness measures, policy and program needs can be derived. For example, if the Army knew that certain kinds of families are more likely to have problems adapting to life overseas, orientation and support programs could be targeted to those categories of families. Further, if the problems for specific types of families are often severe and necessitate the family being returned early from overseas, better screening policies could be developed, reducing financial and readiness costs.

In order to be most useful for policy and program planning, research on the relationship between family factors and readiness should examine how families' experiences with particular policies and programs affect readiness. Examples of the many questions that need to be answered through this kind of research include: How do the presence and specific features of neighborhood and/or unit family support groups affect the incidence of early returns from

field maneuvers of service members due to family problems? To what extent do policies increasing stability of unit personnel foster social support networks among spouses and to what extent does this support decrease family-related absenteeism and raise unit morale? Does the provision to family members of transportation to on-post facilities (e.g., medical care facilities, commissary) affect absenteeism and morale?

As with the research on retention, there is a need to quantify the impacts of family factors, programs, and policies on various measures of readiness, and to assess the relative costs and benefits of resource allocation choices.

RESEARCH GUIDELINES

The above Research Agenda section summarizes some of the major substantive questions to be addressed by research on Army families. This section lists some miscellaneous guidelines for the conduct and parameters of the research.

To the extent that resources are available, research should encompass the total Army, including active duty, civilian, reserve, and National Guard. There is generally priority given to active duty families. Since the extent of our existing knowlege about families differs for the different components, it is likely that different kinds of research will be done on the different components, or at least that the emphasis will be different. Certainly, in the long run, research on family effects on readiness would be incomplete unless it included all components of the force.

Research should include a variety of specific organizational contexts, including those jobs or places with special requirements that are likely to have implications for families.

Research should include a variety of specific family configurations, including those families that tend to have special needs, as well as those that represent larger categories of families.

Emphasis should be on determining what promotes family strength and wellness and prevents problems, rather than on the treatment of problems once they occur. The latter concern is not excluded, but should not be the major emphasis of research.

Although not included in the conceptual model used here, the impact of family issues on recruitment can also be considered. This relationship is likely to have several components. For example, the strength of Army families and their satisfaction with the lifestyle may have effects on recruitment in general. The experiences of children in Army families may have special

effects on recruitment. They have traditionally served as an important source of personnel, especially career personnel. Further, the image of the Army that adolescent children convey to their peers is likely to have effects on the recruitment of their high school peers.

Research must use a variety of methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative. There is no one methodology that can be used to answer all the important research questions. The necessary research will incorporate large scale survey research, in-depth interviewing, analysis of existing data, observation, and experimental program intervention. Some questions necessitate the use of longitudinal data, including panel designs.

Any specific research plan should have built into it mechanisms for coordinating research activities with other research and data-gathering efforts on military families (including the other services), both new and ongoing. For example, measures of important variables need to be systematically constructed and should build on previous and ongoing research, both civilian and military.

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