



# U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI)

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## The Strength of Our Soldiers is Our Families

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# Introduction



## Military

- ADRP 6-22: “All Soldiers and Army Civilians must serve as leaders and followers.”
- ADP 6-22: “Every member of the Army, military or civilian, is part of a team and functions in the role of leader and subordinate. Being a good subordinate is part of being an effective leader. Leaders do not just lead subordinates—they also lead other leaders. Leaders are not limited to just those designated by position, rank, or authority.”
- FM 6-22: “Army leaders are the competitive advantage the Army possesses that technology cannot replace nor be substituted by advanced weaponry and platforms.”

*“The strength of our Nation is our Army; the strength of our Army is our Soldiers; the strength of our Soldiers is our families. That is what makes us Army Strong” – Army Chief of Staff General Odierno (August 2015)*



# Introduction



## Scientific Problem

- How do Soldiers develop as leaders?





# Introduction

## Theoretical Background

- Leadership emerges alongside general adult development and occurs through multiple complex interactions over time (Day et al., 2009)
  - Peer relationships are important learning opportunities for our future leaders (Day, 2000)
  - Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2009)
- Research suggests both positive and negative linkages exist between work and family roles due to participating in multiple roles across the work and family domains (Hanson et al., 2006)
  - Positive and negative effects of spillover (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000)
  - Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)





# Aims

- Identify the influences of family to work spillover on Army leader development and identity
  - Identify patterns in how a Soldier's home life positively influences their identity and development as a leader over time
- What parts of family life are most influential to our leaders?
- Examine how lessons from family experiences can be integrated into Army training to make our leaders stronger





# Interviews



89 participants (approx. 10% female)

- 37 Combat Arms
- 24 Combat Support
- 20 Combat Support Services
- 8 Special

## Interview Structure:

- 30-60 minute interviews
- Participants were asked a series of questions
  - Get-to-know-you questions and their thoughts on leadership as a construct.
  - Describe the leadership role they had created for themselves.
  - How they developed into who they are as a leader.
  - How they have changed as a leader over time.

Officers	NCOs
5 LTs	2 SGTs
18 CPTs	8 SSGs
9 MAJs	23 SFCs
6 LTCs	10 MSG/1SGs
4 COLs	4 SGM/CSMs
42 Officers	47 NCOs



# Results



## Four Themes Emerged

- Role models and authority figures while young
- Social experiences and key relationships such as marriage
- Caring for loved ones and becoming parents
- Grappling with challenging life events and transitions such as divorce



# Results



## Role Models and Authority Figures While Young

- When responding to the question, 'How did you develop into who you are as a leader?' participants provide examples of early life role models, such as grandparents and parents
- The values acquired from family early in life are ingrained and have impacted their identity as a leader



# Results



## **Social Experiences and Key Relationships Such as Marriage**

- Soldiers commonly discuss marriage as a key social influence on their approach to leadership, shaping how they view themselves as a leader and their understanding of how leaders should approach interactions with their subordinates
  - Spouses provide Soldiers with a trusted other to help troubleshoot problems and test ideas that impact subordinates
- Conversations with family members also provide Soldiers with a fresh perspective that tends to incite compassion, maturity, and selflessness across situations



# Results



## Caring for Loved Ones and Becoming Parents

- Soldiers discuss the importance of how caring for others during their childhood and adulthood impacts their development as a leader and helps form their leader identity
- Soldiers report an increase in perspective taking, which leads to more patience, as well as learning effective strategies for influencing subordinates through interactions with their children



# Results



## Grappling with Challenging Life Events and Transitions Such As Divorce

- Divorce had a significant impact on leader development in two key ways
  - Experiencing divorce allows leaders to better relate to subordinates who are going through similar home situations
  - Divorce is viewed by some as a way to identify areas that need to be addressed or improved both at home and at work



# Scientific Contribution



- Advances understanding of how leader development occurs inside and outside of the military
- Knowledge regarding development and change over time
  - Including implications for topics within the work-life literature
- Advances multiple literatures
  - Implications for topics within the work-life literature
  - Adds to role-modeling and learning literatures
- Strengthens leader development paradigms





# Potential Army/Military Applications



Family-to-work spillover suggests that future leader development programs within the Army should consider how home life may provide a leadership foundation in which Soldiers develop as leaders. Results can be applied to:

- Leverage non-Army leadership experiences to enhance current and future Army leaders
- Enhance Soldier leadership coursework with home influence aspects to catalyze leader development

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