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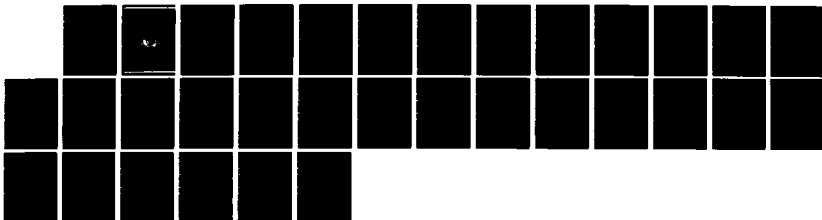
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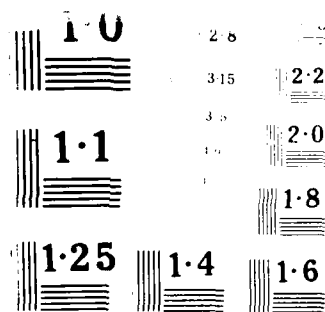
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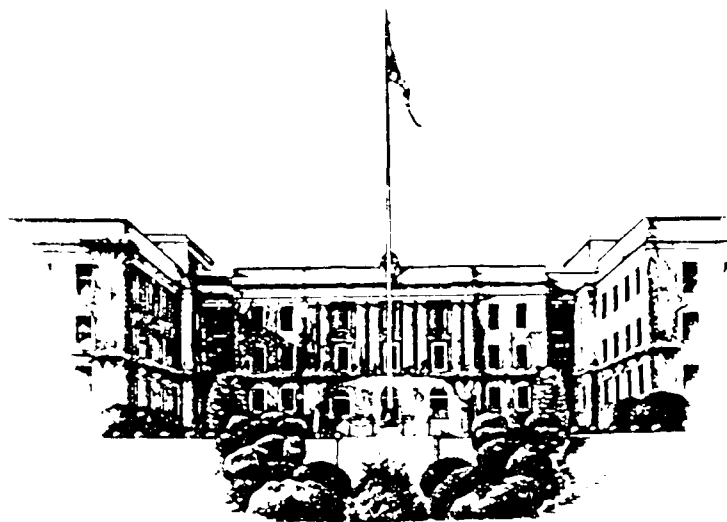
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The Special Needs of Junior Enlisted Families



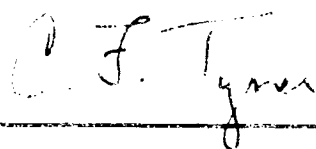
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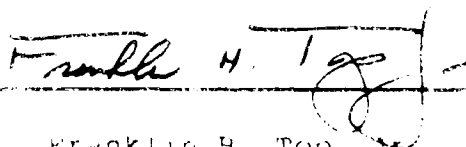
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THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF JUNIOR ENLISTED FAMILIES

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PREFACE

This paper is one of a series of occasional, informal accounts of work in the Division of Neuropsychiatry at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. The reports generally address topics in Army preventive medicine for which implementation responsibility lies significantly outside the Medical Department. Although their contents may overlap partly with our publications in the scientific literature, most papers are based on trip reports, briefings, and consultations involving specific Army audiences. Comments to the senior author are welcome.

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This report was prepared in reply to a 1984 request from the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel as one of the activities associated with designing and implementing the Army Family Action Plan.

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INTRODUCTION

We have in process several major investigations to gather both statistical and conceptual information on the special needs of the families of junior enlisted soldiers. These include two studies of "waiting" families during deployments to the Sinai (Van Vranken et al., 1983 and Lewis, 1984c), a study of waiting wives during the combat mission to Grenada (Lewis, 1984b) and a longitudinal study of the impact of the Army's New Manning System on the quality of family life (Martin, 1984). Standardized questionnaire and personal interviews have been used to obtain information from families who are new to the Army, in the midst of their first duty assignments (CONUS) and on accompanied or unaccompanied overseas tours.

In conjunction with the emphasis on investigating family issues, unit leaders at all levels have been interviewed for their views on the importance of family issues to combat readiness and soldier performance. Supplementing these interviews are data collected from military community representatives (e.g., Army Community Services, Community Life Programs, Family Advocacy Management Teams, etc.)

We should note from the outset that the focus of this discussion will be the male junior enlisted soldier, his civilian wife and their children, if any. Although there are other possible configurations of the junior enlisted family (e.g., dual military and female soldiers married to a civilian), these form only a small percentage of all junior enlisted families and constitute a series of special cases deserving independent consideration.

The special needs of junior enlisted families deserve particular attention from policy makers for three important reasons. First, from studies conducted in other branches of the military, we know that over half of the personnel who are not reenlisting cite family issues as a major reason for their decision (see, for example, Szuc, 1982). Early intervention and preventive strategies, then, should contribute to retaining qualified personnel and be significantly cost-effective in the long run.

Second, we know from the 1983 Annual Soldier Survey that over half of the respondents noted that they had experienced family problems directly related to their military service. Regardless of how the family problems

are expressed -- whether in the form of family violence, substance abuse, divorce etc. -- the cost to the Army is enormous in terms of time lost from work, poor performance on the job and inadequate provision of services.

Finally, from studies of Israeli soldiers who participated in the Arab-Israeli conflicts, we know that there is a positive association between pre-existing family problems and neuropsychiatric breakdowns on the battlefield (Noy, 1978). Intervention to prevent this loss of personnel should the U.S. Army participate in a similar conflict should be a high priority for policy and program planners.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Family Configurations

According to the 1983 Annual Soldiers Survey, approximately 25% of first tour enlistees are married when they enter the Army. Survey data taken in the past year show that the spouse of a typical junior enlisted combat arms soldier is relatively young (e.g. 50% of COHORT wives studied are under the age of 21), from a small town or rural area, and has a limited amount of education and/or work experience.

The junior enlisted family is configured in one of two primary ways. Either the couple is recently married (and many marry after Basic or just prior to the first duty assignment) and still negotiating their new roles and responsibilities, or the couple is previously married. These two types of configurations need to be considered separately.

Many junior enlisted soldiers marry almost immediately after the completion of Basic training. This fact is, in and of itself, both interesting and important. In completing his training, the soldier demonstrates his mastery of an important rite de passage and thus, in a symbolic sense, is initiated into adult manhood. In American culture, one natural consequence of this initiation is to marry. For her part, the young woman also places a great deal of

importance on getting married. For some of these women, it is a validation of their own adulthood, a means to independence and in some instances, a way to escape an unpleasant family situation. Yet, when asked if marriage to a soldier is what they expected, almost invariably the wives reply "No". Nothing in their previous experiences as high school students, as daughters, or as girlfriends prepared them for the responsibilities and the consequences of being Army wives. They have, in fact, entered a new phase of their lives without ever being totally socialized into the old one. Their expectations and values remain those of dependent teenagers rather than independent, well socialized adults. Often they lack critical social and survival skills -- how to drive, how to balance a checkbook, how to plan for and prepare a balanced meal, how to plan a family, how to care for a newborn baby, or even how to distinguish between the fantasy life of soap operas and the reality of their own.

Many of the young husbands are, in terms of readiness for marriage and family responsibilities, equally unskilled and unsocialized. Their deficiencies in these areas, however, are often masked by their competence as soldiers, an area in which they often perform quite well but without seeing the possible consequences to their marriages or families. Frequently the young husband cannot understand the anger that his wife expresses when he returns home after being in the field for a week. Nor can he understand why his wife should object if he decides to "go out" with his buddies after duty rather than return home and take her out for an evening.

The other prominent configuration of the junior enlisted family is composed of those couples who married prior to the decision to enlist. Of the couples who have been surveyed in COHORT units during their first tour, 68% already had at least one child when the father enlisted in the Army. Many of these families (42%) had two or more children, usually under the age of five. In this type of family unit, much adjustment of expectations is necessary in order for the marriage to survive the transition from a civilian to a military life style. For example, one young wife explained that being in the Army was great because "...it only cost me \$15.00 to have my second baby. The first one cost \$1400." This woman was then pregnant with her third child in four years. Nowhere in her world-view was the idea that these 'inexpensive births' would grow into children who would have needs of their own, and that these needs would increase in cost as the children grow.

Economic Issues

Extensive interviews with junior enlisted families suggest that one of the primary motivations for the initial decision to enlist was the state of the civilian economy. In the midst of growing unemployment, the Army's program of enlistment bonuses and educational opportunities appeared to many couples as a solution to their economic difficulties, particularly for those families previously in debt. However, enlistment bonuses and steady paychecks do not always lead to sound practice in money management. A casual question about "what did you and your husband do with his enlistment bonus?" may generate such answers as: "We spent it on a new color TV and a VCR and a new stereo" and "We made a down payment on a new car" and "What enlistment bonus?" The inability of some young couples to manage their own finances can become particularly acute in OCONUS posts. In areas where consumer goods are cheaper than they are in the States, where tourist attractions are expensive and where slot machines and other forms of gambling are more readily available, the downward financial spiral may end in large debts for the family. Soldiers whose finances are significantly out of control may find that they are subject to punitive measures, an Article 15, or even discharge from the Army.

Often these families will turn to the AER for assistance only to find that AER cannot help them with this kind of problem. At one post, the prevalence of young troops being unable to manage their finances and seeking help from AER has become so severe that AER was compelled to publish the following: "There is a definite stigma attached to AER due to allegations that we are not responsive to low-ranking enlisted personnel and that we indiscriminately refer individuals requesting assistance to the Red Cross. These allegations are totally unfounded; 95% of AER clientele are E-5 and below." This final statistic deserves further explication. In part, it reflects the inadequacies of the financial management skills among the junior enlisted families. (We should note, however, that officers and senior enlisted personnel frequently do not seek assistance simply because of the social stigma attached to AER.) Interviews with AER officers, on the other hand, suggest that most AER loans are, in fact, made to married enlisted soldiers to assist them with their initial housing costs.

Most of the major phases of the first enlistment period, too, place additional economic strains on the young

family. The enforced separation period of Basic and AIT may only have exacerbated these pre-existing economic problems as the family endeavors to maintain two separate residences. Their most crucial (and expensive) issues, however, remains the move to their first permanent duty station and the establishment of their new home. Often, families never really 'recover' from these initial expenses and live from paycheck to paycheck barely meeting payments on subsistence items like rent and food. Their precarious financial situations, then, make them extremely vulnerable to any unforeseen expense (e.g., a bill for major car repairs, or a wife's trip to the dentist).

The Stress of the Military Life-Style

During our interviews, many young wives expressed the feeling that they must compete with the Army for their husbands' time, attention and energy. Similarly, their husbands complain that the long duty hours, special duty on weekends and holidays, and the inflexibility of their leaders make it difficult for them to fulfill their roles as husbands and fathers. The conflicting demands on the soldier's time and the expressed "competitive" atmosphere generate additional stress on both husbands and wives. Wives who have not yet developed the internal resources necessary to deal adequately with the conflicting demands of military life often exhibit behaviors which will only exacerbate their problems. "I was so lonely for the first few months that we were here that I started drinking -- sometimes at ten o'clock in the morning. I didn't care about taking care of the kids or anything. I just drank until I passed out." Or, "If my husband can't be bothered to come home and pay attention to me, then I'll go find someone who will." Husbands who are unable and/or unwilling to face these kinds of conflicts at home may soon find that they are spending more and more time after duty hours with their buddies from the unit. In some units there is even a built-in reinforcement for this kind of behavior and approval is given, either tacitly or overtly, for such extra demonstration of "after hours" unit cohesion. In the most extreme forms, a "macho" ethic is reinforced and going home to the wife and children is frowned upon unless the soldier is in an advanced state of intoxication.

Separations are a major source of stress for many young Army wives. Combat arms soldiers, especially those in elite units, deploy frequently for field training exer-

cises. The vacuum caused by the absence of her husband must then be filled by a young wife who may not have requisite skills for dealing with the stress of these separations and reunions. In many of these units, the husband may be absent from the home more than half of his first tour. During his frequent absences, the young wife is expected to maintain the home, care for the children, and perform the roles that have been temporarily vacated by her husband. Unfortunately, few young wives have the skill or the ability to shift their roles easily back and forth, and the transition periods (i.e., just prior to the departure and just after the return) tend to be frustrating and stressful for both husband and wife.

Special Needs of Bi-Cultural and Transcultural Families

There is a small but growing number of bi-cultural marriages within the junior enlisted population. These families not only face the same stresses and problems outlined above, but they must also deal with an additional set of complications. Commonly expressed problems include discrimination in the military community, language barriers, and insensitivity on the part of both military and civilian service providers. Although some of these families have been able to develop strong ties with others from similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds, many are isolated from significant participation in either their communities or the military life-style.

COMMON NEEDS OF THE JUNIOR ENLISTED FAMILY

Family Needs During Basic and AIT

On the whole, the Army presents the young family with a curious set of contrasts that become apparent as early as the husband's departure for basic training. While recruiters may stress the Army's concern for its families, the young wife's first experience with the Army is often quite different. Effectively, soldiers are sequestered for the eight weeks of basic training and families are prohibited from moving near the training post. In some instances, soldiers are told that not only are they forbidden to see

their families, or have them near the training site, but also that if such infractions occur, the soldier will be punished. In many cases, soldiers and their young wives feel that this is but the first instance in which they have been told by the Army that families are not important or that they are an unnecessary hindrance to the performance of the soldier's duty. What these couples perceive most acutely is the contrast between the Army's promotional literature and the reality of basic training. For this period of basic training, the contrast is quite distinct and often leaves both the young wife and her husband with an uneasy feeling of initial distrust of the Army and Army representatives.

While it is both appropriate and necessary for the new soldier to concentrate on learning basic skills and developing new attitudes for his role as a soldier, it is probably inappropriate and unnecessary to leave the young soldier's family in a social vacuum (vis a vis the Army) for this period. Just as the young soldier needs to be socialized into the mores of the Army, so does the young wife. Without a firm knowledge of her new world, the young wife may well move to the first duty station unable and/or unwilling to adjust to her new role.

On the whole, the weeks which comprise Basic and AIT can and should be seen as an important time for beginning to socialize the family unit into the military. Low-cost, high impact outreach programs of information and welcome could easily be instituted to introduce young wives to the intricacies of Army language ("What is a BDU, anyway?"), Army facilities and military family benefits. Such basic information would, at a minimum, give young wives enough knowledge to be able to ask the right questions at the first duty station and would serve well to break down some of the initial barriers which isolate families.

Family Needs at the First CONUS Assignment

In many areas, the first CONUS duty assignment represents a unique set of challenges for the young military family. Junior enlisted families are generally not eligible for on-post housing. If the family unit is to remain together, they must then seek adequate and affordable housing in the civilian community. It is critically important, then, that installation agencies, like the Housing Division (or its functional equivalent) provide adequate

and appropriate guidance to these young couples. Interview data suggest that many couples do not seek this kind of assistance simply because they are unaware that it is available to them. Other couples have expressed the opinion that the staff of the Housing Office was either inadequate or not helpful for finding suitable and affordable housing.

Equally important is the role of unit leaders in assisting young families when they initially arrive at their first permanent assignment. Experience suggests that by the time Division guidelines on the amount of time allowed to settle one's family are actually implemented, the soldier may find that he receives no time off to look for housing or to settle his family. All too frequently, it is also true that the soldier will find himself deployed to the field on the day that his family and/or household goods arrive, leaving his young wife to grapple with the situation as best she can.

Obviously, unit leaders may not always be able to arrange or rearrange the unit's schedule to suit the needs of the individual soldier, but in these cases, more emphasis needs to be placed on unit-based support for the young family. Instead, we find that these young families "wait out" these situations alone in their new apartment or trailer, or, worse yet, in the guest house or a local motel. It is situations such as these which can become the foundation for a persistent negative family attitude toward the unit, the installation and the Army as a whole.

Regardless of what help the young family receives from the Army in locating housing, available residences near major installations are generally limited to apartment complexes and trailer parks. Either of these options can generate yet another set of potential problems. First the rental housing near major installations tends to be owned by businessmen who know quite well what an E-1 can afford to pay. Therefore, they charge accordingly. Trailers may be packed together side by side so that the maximum number can be crowded into the smallest space. This leaves no room for trees which might give shade in the summer and alleviate the need for air conditioning (with its attendant high electric bills). Many apartment complexes and trailer parks make no accommodations for the large number of young children who live there; there may be no playground equipment or even an open space in which these children can safely play. Trash disposal tends to be a common dumpster which will be emptied once a week and which, in hot weather

or year-round warm climates, presents a potential health hazard. In some trailer parks, the roads may not even be paved.

All of these problems can be further exacerbated by the fact that such housing tends to be somewhat distant from the post. Often, young families can only afford one car which the husband uses to transport himself back and forth to post each day. This leaves the young wife without easy access to the post for herself. Often, public transportation is either unavailable or inadequate. In these instances, even when such transportation is available, young wives may not have the requisite skills for learning about and using it. The wife then feels isolated from the post and unable to leave the apartment complex or trailer park at will. Emergency situations become, by definition, almost unmanageable.

The most unfortunate aspect of these types of housing for the young family is the absence of any sense of community or neighborhood. Rather than building relationships between people with common problems, their inadequate housing breeds hostility and fear. Some of these fears are racially based, for many of these families have never before lived in a racially mixed environment. Their prior experiences may not have fostered feelings of tolerance for differences among people. Some of the fears are sexually based, and young husbands feel that if their wives are left alone in these environments that either she will seek out a sexual relationship with one of the neighbors or that she will be sexually assaulted.

Initial Adjustments to a Military Life-Style

As the junior enlisted family settles into the routine of military living, several other adjustments must take place. For the young wife the first CONUS post will be her initial direct experience with the Army and its attendant life-style. From her perspective, the Army and its institutions may be overwhelming, intimidating and frustrating. Routine activities -- cashing a check, going grocery shopping, seeking medical care -- are no longer simple or easily managed. Even her smallest expectations about family life may need to be significantly reworked.

Frequently, neither husbands nor wives have clearly

understood the fact that duty hours usually exceed the civilian nine-to-five routine and that it may be common in some units to work on weekends and holidays as well. Those times which she expects to have as time together may well be interrupted by duty requirements. Wives who are not supportive and/or who do not fully understand and accept a combat soldier's duty requirements soon find themselves competing with the Army for their husbands' time and attention. Or, as one young wife put it "What husband? You mean that man who comes home sometimes, eats dinner and falls asleep?" or "The children don't have a father anymore. All they see is me." Early in her career as an Army wife, then, she must learn that being a military family is a cooperative, not a competitive endeavor, or eventually she will present her husband with the ultimatum: "It's either the Army or me."

In addition to coping with the sense of loss engendered by their husbands' frequent absences, young wives must also face a bewildering array of Army agencies, offices and facilities which are supposed to help her and her family prevent or solve various problems. What she quickly discovers is that access to much of the assistance is difficult unless her husband accompanies her: "They (the Army) just don't take me seriously." Even a simple process like replacing an identification card cannot be accomplished without the husband intervening on his wife's behalf and presenting written proof of their relationship. Although the Army has attempted to change the term for wives from "dependent" to "family member" in the official literature, the attitude which made "dependent" a pejorative term has not disappeared. In interviews, wives have recounted numerous incidents of trying to obtain necessities, including emergency medical care for a child, only to be told come back with the husband.

On the other hand, wives must also adjust to the popular admonishment that they have the power to harm a husband's career. Wives, although generally powerless in most of their dealings with the Army, are often perceived as a major factor in career advancement, and are, therefore, admonished to "be good." The parameters of good behavior, however, are hazy. Wives have reported that their husbands do not want them to visit the unit area because "someone might get the wrong impression," that they should not call the company office to talk unless it's a life and death emergency; that they should always be polite to the NCOs and officers, that they should not "fraternize" with wives of higher ranking soldiers, that they should not

cause "trouble at" (i.e., complain about) an on-post facility like the hospital, and that under no circumstances should they discuss their family life with any other wives.

The cumulative effect of this situation is that families become further isolated from any sense of participation in the Army community. Wives begin to perceive all of their interactions with other members of the military community as potentially hazardous and gradually build up a sense of paranoia about the Army. In some cases, young husbands "hide" their families from the Army and vice versa; on the one hand, denying to the Army that they are married, and on the other hand keeping their wives from knowing much about their jobs, the post activities and facilities, and even refusing to allow their wives to participate in Community Life Programs or town meetings in their neighborhood. Eventually, wives who are told to "stay away" from the military will do so.

Avoiding this type of dichotomy between family and the Army should be one of the primary goals of Army family outreach programs, for families need to feel that their supportive role also contributes to the Army and to the mission of the husband's unit. In particular, from his first encounter with the recruiter, the young husband needs to feel that he can entrust his wife and family to the Army. Lack of trust, initiated by the recruiter, augmented by the experiences of basic training and the first duty assignment can lead to such an exaggeration of the "hidden" family syndrome that husbands literally lock their wives into the trailers whenever they go to the field. Recently, one young wife was found by neighbors in her trailer, severely beaten, with no money or food in the house. More shocking than her condition, however, was the prevalent attitude among service providers that "this sort of thing just happens."

Indeed, the most successful situations in military communities which have been reported are those in which the unit has encouraged the development of an active wives' network with senior wives (i.e., wives who are senior in age and in experience, not necessarily senior by virtue of their husbands' ranks) willing and able to extend themselves by welcoming and providing some initial assistance to the younger wives. Although we have gathered some reports of successful outreach programs run on an installation-wide basis (e.g., Army Community Service, Community Life Programs, and Chaplains' programs), we have found that

the most effective type of support comes from the unit with which the family is associated. It is, indeed, critically important that these young wives have the opportunity to interact (and, ultimately, learn from) other wives in similar circumstances.

Interactions with wives who have successfully negotiated the transitional phase from civilian to military life are most effectively accomplished when small unit leaders actively promote unit-family relationships and provide a supportive atmosphere within the unit for its families. An excellent example of such an interaction was recently reported to us. A battalion had deployed to the field for a month's advanced training, leaving behind a rear detachment and approximately 200 wives. One young wife returned home in the afternoon to discover that her trailer had been robbed. Although her first instinct was to move home to her parent's house, instead she called her company contact wife who, in turn, called the rear detachment commander. The latter immediately went out to the trailer, assisted the young wife in her interview with the local police, and helped to settle her and her small child at a friend's home for the evening. As soon as the other wives in her husband's unit heard of the robbery, they made offers of housing and assistance to the young wife. Within 24 hours, the young wife felt so supported and so secure in her relationships with the other families of the unit that she was able to call her parents and ask for the financial assistance to install a burglar alarm in her trailer.

EMPLOYMENT AND CHILD-CARE NEEDS

In an earlier section on economics, we mentioned that the financial standing of many junior enlisted families is precarious. Previously existing debts, the initial cost of moving and obtaining housing for their families, insufficient money management skills, one or more small children and the relatively low pay of junior enlisted troops all combine to make the initial stages of a military career financially difficult.

In order to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, wives are often compelled to seek employment, thus opening several more areas of potential stress. Wives with any educational or technical skills report that, on the whole, the majority of employers in the civilian business communities surrounding major military installations are

frequently reluctant, if not unwilling, to hire military wives. The businesses say that the transience of military families makes it unfeasible to hire and train them; these same businesses, however, are more than willing to capitalize on the situation. Many who are willing to hire Army wives do so for only 20 hours a week, thus avoiding the costs associated with full-time employees (i.e., vacation, retirement, union problems). Thus, a young woman who either needs to work full-time or who simply wants to work full-time, may well find that she is compelled to hold down two jobs at one time, a feat made more difficult if the jobs are in two locations several miles distant from each other. Other civilian employers will offer only wage compensation of \$3.35 an hour when comparable jobs in another area pay significantly more. In the most extreme cases, local newspaper ads, are clearly marked: "Permanent residents only will be considered." Wives say that the same transience makes it difficult for them to have careers, rather than jobs, and that they find themselves continually re-entering the job market at minimum wage or in jobs for which they are patently over-qualified.

For those families in which the wife needs to work in order to help support the family, the problems of day-care also become acute. At a generous estimate, post day-care facilities are available to fewer than one-tenth of the families who could use such services. Further, recent regulations requiring that home caretakers be certified by Army Community Services may significantly reduce the already scarce amount of private day care which is the only available alternative to post day care facilities. Indeed, day care which is reliable and accessible frequently costs more than the wife makes at an unskilled, minimum wage job.

For those women who do not "need" the extra income for subsistence items but who work to increase their own feelings of self-esteem and well-being, the picture is much the same. They confront a small range of employment opportunities and minimum-wage salaries. For these women, the lack of career potential in either private or government employment can produce devastating psychological repercussions, including severe depression and deteriorating physical health. It seems to many of these women that a major source of self-realization and independence has been closed to them because they choose to marry soldiers.

Current information suggests that employment for military wives is associated with significantly higher

levels of personal well-being, regardless of the motive for seeking employment. At all levels, from HQDA to individual installation commanders, pro-active employment efforts should be pursued in order to develop additional on and off post employment opportunities for military wives. The efforts should include not only educational efforts on portable, alternative careers for women but also vigorous action against discriminatory employers and businesses.

To complement this effort, serious attention needs to be given to the problem of child-care, particularly for the preschool children of working parents. In addition to the ACS efforts to regulate in-home child care, creative endeavors -- cooperative nurseries, sliding fee scales, etc -- need to be evaluated and implemented.

CONTINUING ADJUSTMENTS: DEVELOPING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

In thinking about the needs of junior enlisted families, we must reemphasize several points. First, many of these women are very young. Many of them have never before had a home of their own and may never have lived away from their parents and their hometowns. In other words, their variety of life experiences is generally very limited, and hence the skills that would have developed over time and which we find among the more mature wives have not been given a chance to develop. Homesickness and culture shock are often real to these women, as are feelings of isolation from their family and friends and abandonment by their husbands.

Second, these women, on the whole, are relatively inexperienced both in education and in employment. This means that they have few well-established social skills to deal with the inevitable crises of military life and little in the way of social support to meet their personal needs. One of the more interesting and distressing outgrowths of this situation is that these lonely young women tend to spend a great deal of time on the telephone talking long distance to their families and friends at home. Although they feel that this close contact is important in their lives, it unfortunately generates large telephone bills which can further exacerbate the families financial

difficulties.

Perhaps the most harmful effect of this combination of lack of education, deficiency of social skills, boredom and uncertain finances is the potential created for domestic violence, including incidences of child abuse and child neglect. Although these types of behavior are not limited to junior enlisted families, certain characteristics interact to form an environment in which they are more likely to occur. Many of these young women and men are uneducated in the basics of child-care, nutrition and safety and have no readily available role models. They are geographically separated from their own mothers and probably have had little or no opportunity to interact with older women who could give help and advice. Frequently, unable to manage their own finances sufficiently to pay their subsistence bills, items like baby formula and vitamins are the first things cut from the budget. Or, wanting to go out for an evening, the parents perceive no problem with leaving the baby in the car seat while they spend an evening at the NCO/EM club. Behaviors such as these are not necessarily intentionally abusive and could be easily prevented by educational programs, rather than being treated as problems by the post social service agencies.

It is frequently true that the wife's perception of her husband's role in the Army contributes significantly to her acceptance (or lack of it) of his frequent absence from home and his irregular hours. The wife may "blame" the Army (in general) for the fact that she feels abandoned by him, isolated from her own family and friends and uninvolved in any useful outside activity. As time goes on, however, this feeling that her husband is powerless within the Army may well change to a feeling that her husband is directly involved in the choices which are being made and which adversely affect the family. In the worse cases, she may begin to hold her husband responsible for the long hours and the weeks in the field. Or, in the best cases, she may come to feel that by maintaining a home in her husband's absence, she is performing a significant and helpful role both within the family and for her husband's unit.

To a large extent this perception of the husband's role and importance in the Army is influenced by how small unit leaders perform their management tasks. Rightly or wrongly, company and battalion level leaders are perceived

as having a tremendous amount of control over the lives and life experience of soldiers and their families. Frequently, within the same unit, there will be wide variance in the ways in which their leaders exercise this control, differences which are aptly reflected in the wives' opinion of "how the Army feels about me".

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find significant differences in leadership style even at platoon and squad levels. These stylistic differences may become the bases of either a positive or a negative family attitude. For example, it is a devastating experience for a junior enlisted wife to find that her husband is not allowed to come home from the field as she goes into labor. If she knows or believes that, in another platoon in the same company, her friend's husband did not even deploy to the field because of an approaching childbirth, the effect will be even worse and far more long-lasting.

In a supportive unit environment, many possibilities remain open to counteract the negative experiences of the young wife. One effective technique used in an elite combat arms unit was a "Go to Work With Your Husband Day." For one day, husbands demonstrated their skills as soldiers to an audience comprised of their wives and children. This experience left a lasting positive impression on the wives who attended. Indeed, for many it was their first experience in seeing a squad "take a hill" or a soldier disassemble and reassemble a rifle. Wives also participated in some of the minutiae of a soldier's life: some were permitted to drive jeeps, and all given C-rations for lunch. As mentioned above, it is critically important for unit leaders to provide an atmosphere which encourages interactions among unit families. Junior wives need positive role models so that they can learn first hand how to survive the multiple traumas of Army life. Sharing experiences with other wives, indeed, may make the difference between a wife who encourages her husband to reenlist and one who insists that the family leave the Army and returns to a civilian life-style.

FAMILY NEEDS: THE FIRST OCONUS ASSIGNMENT

All of the problems which young families experience in their first CONUS assignment are magnified when played out in a foreign country, and the expected glamour of an overseas assignment may quickly dim. Problems with landlords and repairmen are frequently exacerbated by a language barrier and a different set of cultural standards for what is appropriate behavior. In recent interview a young wife explained that she was having difficulty with her neighbors because of her laundry. Although local custom involved one's wash on the balcony, the neighbors objected that the wife did not own the proper drying rack and that her husband's fatigues were "ugly." After several confrontations with the neighbors, the young wife was visited by the MPs who told her that the neighbors had complained about the problem she was creating in the building.

Shipping the family car to the overseas post or, alternatively, purchasing one upon arrival, may not be financially feasible, and, therefore, transportation from home to post may become a major problem. Even those families who can afford the luxury of their own transportation may find that the cost of insuring the car will consume a major portion of the family's budget. This addition of an unexpectedly large expense to an already-strained family economy will only generate more stress between the husband and wife.

Employment opportunities on post are frequently limited for military wives due to Status of Forces Agreements, and competition for even the most menial jobs may be stiff. Frequently, wives are unaware of the SOFA provisions and only see that the local nationals are hired instead of them. They feel that once again they have been discriminated against, and the local nationals on post become an easy target for their anger and their hostility. Wives who have tried to enter the civil service while stationed OCONUS often believe that the primary function of the Civilian Personnel Office is to thwart their efforts to work. Wives who have tried and failed to secure employment this way state firmly that applicants are selected on the basis of favoritism or on the husband's status. Frequently, they will cite examples of senior NCO and officer's wives who obtained jobs within weeks of arriving OCONUS. A more reasonable explanation (e.g., that these wives have more work or educational credentials) is rarely considered.

Even the most mundane CONUS activities which wives used to fill up the empty hours of their husbands' absence (e.g., going to the movies, shopping at the mall, watching T.V., listening to the radio) are often unavailable to them. Some women report that they have, in a few months, exhausted all of the available activities on post: they have used all of the molds in the Arts and Crafts shop, they have rented all of the video tapes that they can afford, they have taken the one exercise class open to wives. Other wives who never explored the on-post facilities in CONUS are unaware that such activities are even available. A few wives have been found who were so depressed and lethargic that, even when offered a chance to do something, they were unable to capitalize on it.

We have mentioned previously that many families have limited educational experiences and backgrounds. In terms of an overseas assignment, they are not necessarily eager to explore historic sites, art museums or even to become involved in the local language and culture. At one OCONUS post, only 2 of 31 wives interviewed were even making an attempt to learn the local language. For them, the prospect of touring a foreign country has little appeal, and, indeed, one woman reported that she and her husband had traveled to a nearby historic city in order to eat hamburgers at Wendy's. Aside from the lack of interest in seeing another country, even those families who attempt to venture out of the host city find that, especially when they are accompanied by a small child or two, their financial status prevents them from doing many of the typical 'tourist' activities.

One of the overriding effects of the above problems is expressed by the young wives as "being bored" and "having nothing to do." Since these women, by and large, have limited resources to deal with their problems, their solutions to the boredom sometimes have far ranging consequences. In one OCONUS study (Lewis, 1984c), many young wives freely admitted having drinking problems and/or extramarital affairs out of boredom with their daily lives. Other wives expressed their inability to cope by focusing more closely on their husbands, and becoming more demanding in terms of how much time they spend together and what they did with that time. Still other wives found a solution to the boredom by gossiping maliciously about each other.

Clearly, there are no simple solutions to these wives'

OCONUS problems. The majority of overseas posts tend to be small, and many young couples fear that the fact of seeking out professional help will be known immediately and held against them indefinitely. Educational programs in the culture of the overseas assignment, in basic language skills, and in life skills, all need to be wedded to the tour rotation process in a much tighter fashion.

FAMILY NEEDS: THE FIRST UNACCOMPANIED ASSIGNMENT

When the junior enlisted soldier is assigned to an area where his family cannot accompany him or when he chooses not to have his family join him overseas, the young family faces another area of major life stress. First the decision must be made about where the family will "wait out" the separation period. Here, economic and personal considerations come into play. Sometimes there is no viable economic alternative but for the wife and children to return home and move back with a parent. Despite the inherent economic advantages in this choice, most young wives are not ready or eager to resume what they perceive to be a "dependent child" relationship.

Alternatively, wives who have been able to find reasonable employment near the current duty assignment are often reluctant to leave the area. Many women expressed the feeling that, because of the friendships they have found and because they feel self-supporting in their jobs, the first duty station is now 'home.' Their young husbands, however are usually reluctant for them to continue to live near the military installation. This reluctance is often based on marital insecurity and the soldier's fear of leaving his young, unaccompanied wife "in an environment with other soldiers."

It has been our experience that families seldom, if ever, receive any assistance with this decision-making process. Occasionally, a chaplain will offer families the opportunity to meet and discuss issues associated with unaccompanied tours, but this type of professional intervention is rare. Based on information gathered from couples facing a short tour in Korea, it would seem both desirable and useful for the unit to sponsor a professionally directed open forum to discuss these issues.

After the husband has deployed, it is extremely important that the young wife feel that military officials and other military families still care about her. This need for some form of "tie to the Army" should encompass not only the first duty station, but also the husband's new unit. Again, this type of linkage is seldom initiated or maintained. Even in COHORT units where there are opportunities for sustained relationships, we have not encountered much ongoing contact or support among those wives who have been "left behind".

It is probable that a strong pre-existing network among the unit wives (with active encouragement from the unit leaders) would be able to meet such needs as effectively for the separated couple as it does for the wife who is waiting for her husband to return from combat. In such cases, the wives' network would be able to make plans for the separation and devise ways in which the wives could maintain contact with each other during the separation. (Based on information from one such network, the approximate monthly cost of producing and mailing a newsletter to wives of an entire battalion was less than \$60.00).

FAMILY NEEDS: THE FIRST DECISION TO RE-ENLIST

As the first enlistment ends, the junior enlisted family must make the critical decision about re-enlistment. This is a time when the family can and should seriously reflect on their military life experiences. Although the re-enlistment decision must be based on a number of factors, one of the key areas should be the "fit" between the needs of the family and the demands of the military. The better the perceived match between the family needs and the military, the more likely it is that the family will be happy and choose the Army as a career.

If, during the first tour, the junior enlisted family has been able to develop positive associations with other families within the unit, including more senior couples, they will be in a better position to make a realistic decision about their own future. Learning about the life experiences of career soldiers and their families can help the junior enlisted family make a more accurate assessment of what the effect of a second tour (or possibly a career)

will have on their family life.

In addition to the unit re-enlistment NCO, unit leaders need to take time to talk to their junior soldiers and their spouses about re-enlistment. Obviously, these leaders will want to emphasize the potential benefits of a military career, especially when the soldier is perceived to be a "good troop." At the same time, however, unit leaders must assume some responsibility for presenting a balanced picture of military life and assist the couple in formulating realistic expectations. This type of interchange should result in better re-enlistment decision for both the Army and its families and not perpetuate the unrealistic attitude that "maybe things will be different on the second tour."

SUMMARY

Based on our data organized into a "life phase" model, this document has highlighted various military life stresses which have significant and palpable effects on junior enlisted families. This is not to suggest that these problems and stresses are associated solely with the life-style of junior enlisted families nor that each junior family experiences the full range of the problems. Rather, we must focus on the fact that unless these problems are dealt with during the first tour either the problems will become exaggerated and less manageable during the second tour or the soldier will either inappropriately remain on active duty or resign from the Army. None of these are desirable consequences and will not enhance combat readiness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, unit leaders have a tremendous potential for either positive or negative impact on the well-being and attitude of their junior enlisted families. These leaders need to be aware of situations and unit policies that place unnecessary stress on family life. They also need to

understand that, under most circumstances, family members are willing to make the necessary sacrifices in support of the soldier's duty requirements. This willingness, however, presupposes that an effort has been made by leaders to help families develop a realistic appreciation of duty requirements and that leaders demonstrate fairness and consistency in the way they treat their subordinates when responding to important family life needs.

Second, an active social support network among wives of the unit has been shown to have significant positive effects in dealing with major military life situations, such as deployments and in establishing an atmosphere of caring among families of the unit. Such networks function best when: 1) there is a core of dedicated wives, enlisted and officer, who are concerned with family issues; 2) when they have the support of the most senior wives and 3) when they have the encouragement and support of the unit leader. The promotion of unit-family relationships through frequent opportunities for family interaction can contribute significantly to unit cohesion and morale and to the improved performance of the individual soldier.

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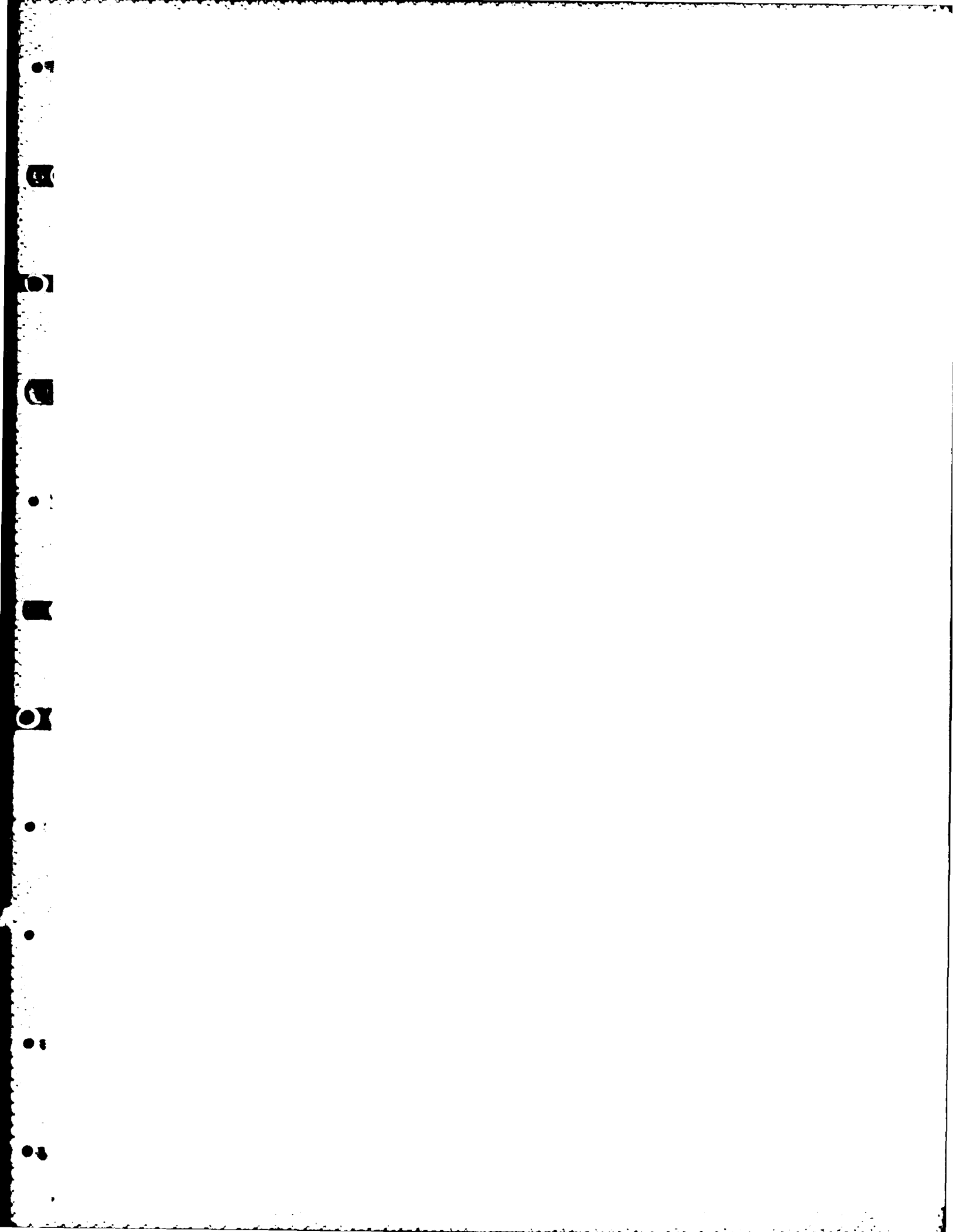
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