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# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

AIR FORCE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
COMPLAINTS DATA BASE

MAJOR GARY H. WHITE

85-2835

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**REPORT NUMBER** 85-2835

**TITLE** AIR FORCE INSPECTOR GENERAL COMPLAINTS DATA BASE

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## PREFACE

This report seeks to determine whether the Air Force Inspector General complaints data base can be used as a statistical tool for predicting potential problems in Air Force programs. The focus is solely on the IG complaints data base and does not attempt to establish the validity of complaints data when it is added to all other sources of complaints or combined with other existing programs which record complaints.

The author is indebted to Lieutenant Colonel Bob Marsh and his dedicated people in AF/IGQ-1, for advice, counsel, guidance, and for providing all the reports, regulations, and computer products upon which this report is based. Without Colonel Marsh's able and ready assistance, not one complaint statistic would have found its way into this report.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Major Gary H. White is a personnel officer with extensive experience in the Air Force Inspector General function. From 1980 to 1982, Major White was a Human Resources Inspector in the Human Resources Branch at the Air Force Inspection and Safety Center, and from 1982 to 1984, an Inquiries and Complaints Action Officer in the office of the Assistant Inspector General for Inquiries and Complaints. During the latter period, Major White reviewed and prepared responses to several hundred Inspector General complaints, and high level Air Force and Department of Defense, congressional, and Presidential inquiries. Major White's other assignments include duty as a base level personnel officer, and Chief, Rated Officer Selective Assignments, Headquarters, Strategic Air Command. Major White has a bachelors degree in personnel management, and a master of business administration degree. He has completed Squadron Officer's School in residence.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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**REPORT NUMBER** 85-2835

**AUTHOR(S)** MAJOR GARY H. WHITE, USAF

**TITLE** AIR FORCE INSPECTOR GENERAL COMPLAINTS DATA BASE

I. Purpose: To determine the validity of the Inspector General complaints data base for use as a statistical management tool to identify existing and potential problems in Air Force programs.

II. Problem: The Inspector General data base was designed to help identify potential or unseen problems so proper individuals could be made aware of them and take action to solve them. There has been little success to date, however, in using the data base for that purpose. This report seeks to analyze the data base in order to determine whether it is a valid tool for statistical inference.

III. Discussion of Analysis: The complaints data collection system was developed to increase knowledge of specific problem areas, identify irritants or problems that may be widespread but not clearly visible, and to provide a programs data base for

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analysis and trending. Little trending is currently being done, however. The reason for this may be suggested by the trends themselves. An analysis of the Inspector General Complaints Program, complaint program perceptions, complainant characteristics, and historical trends in the data base reveals several difficulties in using the data base for predicting potential problems. First, the IG system is designed to solve individual problems as they occur in order to prevent them from happening again and to other people. Potential problems in the same complaint areas are therefore identified before the complaint data is entered into the data base. If the IG system is functioning properly, long term problem areas identified by trends should not be occurring. As supported by the observations concerning complainant characteristics, perceptions commonly held of the IG system, and actual trends, there is no indication that the IG system is not properly and effectively doing its job. Secondly, complaint system surveys have indicated that lower ranking personnel tend to know less about the IG system and may therefore not be using it as much as they might if their knowledge was greater. If this is correct, the data base may be an underestimation of problem areas. Thirdly, over a three year period complaint trends tended to follow a pattern correlated to rank. People with less rank tended to complain more in all categories than higher ranking people. The percentage of complaints in each major category did not vary among ranks in any significant numbers during the three years. Variables such as sex, age, and years of service followed the same pattern as rank. Fourth, since 1976, a consistency has been maintained among the major complaint categories. Even when complaint volumes are increasing or decreasing, each of the major categories has maintained its percentage representation of total complaints within 5% for each year since 1976. This suggests that complaint volume may be influenced by forces external to the major complaint categories.

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IV. Conclusions: Based on the analysis conducted for this report, it does not appear that the IG complaints data base can be effectively used as a statistical tool for predicting potential problems in Air Force programs.

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

In February 1975, the Assistant Inspector General for Inquiries and Complaints sought to develop a means to track Inspector General complaints data for the purpose of analysis and trending. It was believed that a complaints program data base would increase knowledge of specific problem areas, identify irritants or problems that may be widespread but not clearly visible, and allow commanders and staff agencies to take early action on potential problems. Between the time the data collection system was implemented in January 1976 and until the end of 1983, over 102,000 complaints have been processed through the IG complaints system and recorded in the data base. Although the data base is now quite large, it is not at all clear whether it does in fact provide a reliable means to identify potential problems in Air Force programs. At the present time, statistics in the data base are provided to Major Command IGs and Separate Operating Agencies (SOA) on a quarterly basis for comparison with previous reports. Little trending analysis, however, is currently being done. This study seeks to determine whether trending based on the complaints data base would be beneficial or reliable and attempts to answer the question as to whether the complaint statistics can be used as a management tool to identify potential problems in Air Force programs.

The objective of this report is to establish the validity of the complaints data base as a predictive tool or, conversely, the lack of validity for that purpose. Such an analysis requires the examination of all the major factors which would have some impact on the data base validity. It is necessary to determine the relationship each of the factors has toward each other and the effect they have on the data base itself. The purpose and objectives of the Air Force Inspector General complaints program must be clearly understood, as well as the process by which complaints are processed and resolved. Since the complaints data base is a reflection of individuals who submitted complaints and the individuals who answered them, it is essential to determine the characteristics of complainants and the perceptions toward the complaints program by Air Force personnel in general, what they are complaining about, and trends in the complaint categories. Specifically, whether those factors support or detract from the use of the data base as a valid base for statistical inference.

This report will examine five factors which have an impact on the validity of the complaints data base and its use as a management tool for identifying potential problems in Air Force programs. These five factors, each of which will be addressed by a separate chapter in the report, consist of the IG system itself, the categories which make up the data base, perceptions of Air Force personnel toward the IG complaints program, a profile of the complainants who have actually used the system, and complaint trends reflected in the data base. In the final chapter, conclusions and recommendations will be made based on the findings and observations contained in the examinations of the five major factors.

## Chapter Two

### THE INSPECTOR GENERAL COMPLAINTS PROGRAM PROCESS

Each member of the Air Force has the right to file a complaint without fear of retaliatory action. This right is established by Air Force Regulation 123-11. This policy recognizes that the underlying causes of complaints may lead to more severe symptoms such as reduced performance, accidents, poor quality work, or poor morale if not resolved. Therefore, complaints provide commanders an opportunity to discover and correct problems affecting the productivity and satisfaction of their people. Consequently, the emphasis is on real problem resolution and seeks to avoid approaches which merely give the appearance of concern and may overlook the true reasons for the complaints. The formal structure of the IG complaints program seeks to insure that all complaints are fairly considered in a timely manner to the degree which will guarantee that the root causes of the complaints are determined and corrected.

Because there is a formal structure to the complaints program, complaints cannot be ignored. Each complaint which is received must be reviewed, considered against Air Force policy, and a response provided to the complainant. There is no restriction on how a member may enter a complaint into the system, nor may complaints be dismissed because they appear to be insignificant on the surface. Commanders are tasked with the responsibility of fairly and honestly looking into each complaint and resolving the complaint within Air Force policies. Commanders must accept complaints, and must also insure their people are aware of the avenues to voice complaints and encourage them to do so if a perceived problem exists.

Although Air Force personnel are encouraged to attempt to resolve complaints at the lowest possible level, there is no restriction on the level an individual may enter a complaint into the IG system. Quite often the nature of the complaint will determine the level to which it should be forwarded. Many complaints are beyond the capability of local supervisors and commanders to resolve, and often deal with issues of Air Force policy, such as assignment selections, promotions, or Air Force quality force programs. In other cases, the complainant may feel that the complaint would receive a more fair hearing if reviewed at a higher level. In practice, the majority of complaints are

first made to supervisors or unit commanders. Indeed, the majority of complaints are resolved at that level, and are never counted in the Air Force complaint statistics. However, the lack of a restriction of where an individual may make a complaint plays a key part in the integrity of the IG system, and insures a variety of levels are available to receive complaints.

Regardless of the level at which complaints are received, they must receive the same treatment of review and resolution. An individual may make a complaint directly to a supervisor or commander, the local inspector, or to senior command levels, including major commands or numbered Air Forces. The complaint may also be sent to the Air Force IG, members of the congress, senior Defense Department officials, or the President. In each case, it is not the level at which the complaint is entered that is important, but the nature and content of the complaint. In all cases, complaints are staffed to that level which will insure satisfactory resolution of the problem. Conceivably, local commanders could review and resolve complaints initially sent to the President, and an Air Staff agency could end up resolving a complaint made to a first line supervisor. Notwithstanding who is responsible for reviewing or resolving a complaint, the same standards of inquiry or investigation apply.

Whether a complaint is received directly from the individual or being staffed by a higher level, the same quality of review on the complaint is expected. The first decision is to determine if the complaint requires a simple or extensive inquiry, or even an investigation. The appropriate level of inquiry or investigation must be conducted to effectively resolve the complaint. If the complaint is being reviewed by a staff agency with the technical expertise to decide whether Air Force policy is being fairly and correctly applied, this step may be simple. On the other hand, the problem may be of such a nature that a full investigation is necessary in order to determine the facts of the case and to establish whether an error or injustice occurred. The important thing is to insure the complaint gets a complete review. If, as is often the case, the complaint involves allegations against other persons, an inquiry or investigation is necessary to determine the facts.

If a commander decides that an inquiry or investigation is necessary, he will appoint a disinterested party to look into the complaint and prepare a report. The inquiring officer is responsible for determining all the facts surrounding the case, interview all concerned parties, including the complainant, and making conclusions and recommendations if directed by the commander. The appointing commander takes action to resolve the complaint based in large part on the facts determined by the inquiring officer. Since self-investigation is prohibited by Air Force

regulation, the process of inquiry and investigation insures sufficient objectivity to resolve even the most sensitive of complaints. If for some reason an individual believes a complaint was not evaluated objectively, they can request further review by higher command or IG authorities. For those complaints received by authorities above MAJCOM level, additional review is automatic.

Complaints received by or staffed to the Air Force Inquiries and Complaints Office (AF/IGQ-1) are thoroughly reviewed to insure that all the elements of the complaint are answered and that no injustice remains. If it is determined that the problem is caused by the existence of an Air Force policy or its implementation, the complaint is forwarded to the responsible Air Force staff agency for resolution. In many cases, this has resulted in a change to an Air Force program or policy. Since each case is evaluated on its own merits, a volume of cases is not necessary to suggest that a certain policy is contrary to stated Air Force objectives. Often, one complaint alone can result in a policy or program change.

Complaint resolution does not require that an individual be granted the particular solution they desire. As is often the case, the complainant may be questioning a valid Air Force program or contending unjust treatment as justification for their own transgressions. Not uncommonly, the complainant must be told that no problem exists except for their failure to abide by or accept legitimate Air Force policies and standards. There are also a large number of complaints where some action is necessary to correct a real problem. Whenever this occurs, the complaint is sent to that level where the corrective action can be taken. No complaint is ignored because it defies resolution. The answer to the complaint may be an acknowledgement that the particular condition complained about exists and will continue to exist because of Air Force needs - such as many complaints about Palace Balance. Each complaint is, however, reviewed as a separate complaint, regardless of the number of times the particular issue may have been raised. This is one of the most critical factors in the complaint resolution process.

Complaint resolution is a dynamic process and is based on the premise that not only the complainant but many Air Force people may have experienced similar problems or could experience them. Consequently, the complaint is viewed as having a potentially larger impact on productivity and morale of Air Force members. For this reason, each complaint requires re-evaluation of the particular policy or program in question. The Air Force goal is to eliminate potential problems before they grow. This aspect of the IG complaints program process is extremely important in determining the validity of using complaint data in predicting potential problems in Air Force programs. If problems concerning



a particular area are not resolved, it would not be unreasonable to expect a continuing increase in complaints concerning that area. Conversely, if problem areas are resolved we can expect to see little increase in the percentage of complaints for that area or even a decrease. What this means is that if the IG system is working the way it should, the value of complaint data for predicting trends is diminished.

## Chapter Three

### COMPLAINTS DATA BASE

In 1975, the Air Force Inspection and Safety Center Inquiries and Complaints office developed a computer compatible data collection system for recording complaints information at a central point for the purpose of analysis and trending. It was believed that such a system would increase knowledge of specific problem areas, and irritants or problems that may be widespread but not readily visible. The objective was to identify problem areas early so prompt action could be started to correct them. Since January 1976, all complaints entered into the Inspector General complaints program have been recorded in the complaints data base. This chapter will identify the complaint categories used between 1976 and 1983.

Each complaint is recorded against a major complaint category and an intermediate and sub-category. The major category identifies the complaint subject area - such as personnel management; the intermediate category identifies a particular element of the major category - such as assignments; and the sub-category identifies the specific problem - such as denial. For example, a complaint recorded as A/A/01 would read personnel management (A), assignment (A), denial of (01). The major complaint categories are personnel management, accounting and finance, base support, human relations, legal, and miscellaneous.

The personnel management category is the largest complaint category. It contains 12 intermediate categories, with sub-categories ranging from three in the active duty intermediate category to 24 in the assignments intermediate category. The intermediate categories consist of assignments, active duty, enlistment or reenlistment, commissions, promotions, special actions, retirement, separation actions, awards or decorations, records, training, and civilian employment. Since the beginning of the complaints data base system, the personnel management category has received the greatest number of complaints. The largest intermediate category was assignments.

The accounting and finance category consist of the two intermediate categories pay and leave, with more complaints being about pay. This category has historically been one of the lowest complaint categories.

Base support has ten intermediate categories consisting of exchange, commissary, hospital or medical care, transportation, housing or dormitories, services, facilities or material, dependents schools, contracts, and traffic control. This category contains complaints against an installation's facilities, service and overall management. Historically, it is the second highest complaint category for career enlisted personnel, and the highest category for field grade officers.

Human relations is comprised of the three intermediate categories of treatment, discipline, and personal appearance. Treatment contains such sub-categories as racial and sexual discrimination and dissatisfaction with the IG complaint system. Discipline includes unjust punishment, and Article 15 actions among others. Personal appearance includes complaints related to dress standards and weight control. Human relations is the highest complaint category for young, lower ranking airmen.

The legal category contains three intermediate categories of judicial, legal assistance, and claims. This category has received the smallest number of complaints.

The miscellaneous category includes environmental, Air Force public participation, organizational policies, and general policy intermediate categories. The miscellaneous category provides an area for recording complaints which do not fall under other complaint categories. The number of complaints received and recorded against the miscellaneous category has always been small.

The complaints data base provides a historical record of the complaints behavior of Air Force personnel since 1976. It permits identification of specific complaint areas, and provides a picture of who was complaining about what. That does not imply that it can be used for forecasting trends. In the chapters which follow, the data base elements will be examined more closely with the specific intent of determining whether the data base can be used for meaningful analysis and trending, including the identification of existing or potential problem areas.

## Chapter Four

### COMPLAINT PROGRAM PERCEPTIONS

Central to an analysis of the complaints data base, is a determination of the attitudes and perceptions of those who can make use of the complaints program. Such a determination is aided by the complaint program surveys conducted during 1973, 1975, and 1983. These surveys obtained information on the attitudes and perceptions of Air Force personnel of all ranks concerning their knowledge of the IG system, belief in the integrity of the system, credibility of the system, use of the system, and its adequacy.

The surveys were administered to a representative sample of Air Force people in four groups; Airman Basic to Sergeant; Staff Sergeant to Chief Master Sergeant; Second Lieutenant to Captain; and Major to Colonel. The data obtained was generalizable to the four groups at the 95 percent confidence level. The results of the surveys pertaining to the knowledge of, satisfaction with, and use of the complaints system is of particular interest to this report. The reported knowledge of the complaint system was measured in order to determine its effect on the perceived functioning of the system as a whole. The surveys sought to determine whether there was some relationship between knowledge and use of the system. In general, 94% of the individuals responding to the survey were aware that the IG complaint system was available for hearing complaints and problems. The lowest group awareness was with the AB-Sgt group where 83% indicated sufficient awareness to use the system. Whites were more aware than nonwhites, males more aware than females, and officers more aware than enlisted personnel. The higher the grade within the officer and airmen groups, the more knowledge was reported. Of interest is that 42% of the junior airmen and 28% of the junior officers indicated they knew very little about the system.

Overall, 78% of the individuals surveyed said they knew enough about the system to use it. Most of the senior officers and enlisted personnel knew how to use the system whereas three quarters of the junior officers and half of the junior airmen said they probably knew enough. Males indicated they knew more than females, and whites were more knowledgeable than nonwhites.

Individuals who indicated more knowledge about the IG system were also more likely to believe in the integrity, adequacy, and credibility of the system. However, since knowledge tended to increase with rank, less than half of the sample felt the system was honest in its dealings with individuals. Males had indicated more faith in the system than females, and whites more than nonwhites. Senior officers had the greatest faith in the system and junior airmen the least.

In response to the questions concerning use of the IG system, 85% of the sample indicated they had never made a complaint to the base IG. Only 2% indicated having made a congressional complaint or forwarding a complaint to the MAJCOM or Air Force IG. Of those who had made a complaint to the base IG (19%), the major types of problems were related to their jobs, a military personnel problem such as assignment, promotion or separation, or a problem with unjust or unfair treatment. This tracks well with actual complaint statistics. For the most part, people who submitted a complaint or problem during 1983 tended to do so through their immediate supervisor, First Sergeant, unit commander, or staff functional area and not through the base inspector (IG). Over 65% indicated they would turn first to their immediate supervisor if they had a problem. Oddly enough however, of those who had taken a problem to their supervisor, more were dissatisfied with the results than those who had skipped their supervisor and taken their complaint to a higher level. At the same time, most members indicated that the fear of reprisal for making a complaint would be greater if made to a congressman, base commander, Command IG or Air Force IG than to their supervisor. The data does indicate that the majority of complaints are first made to immediate supervisors.

A review of the survey data tends to suggest that although most Air Force members are aware of the IG complaint system and its purpose, they don't know a lot about the system - especially the junior airmen. They basically know enough to use the system if they have to, but would prefer to use their chain of command if they had a problem and not resort to the base inspector. In fact, 83% of the sample had never taken a complaint to the IG, but had gone to their supervisor (43%). Over a third of the sample was satisfied with the IG system, and half felt the system was adequate. Generally, the more knowledge one had, the more they felt satisfied and believed that the system was adequate, had integrity, and was a credible avenue for getting complaints resolved.

The complaints surveys indicated that the IG complaint system would not be a primary avenue for making complaints. This was true at all grade levels. This suggests that the total complaint volume may be understated and could be increased if the knowledge level of lower ranking airmen was increased.

## Chapter Five

### COMPLAINANT PROFILES

The purpose of this chapter is to determine who complains about what. The complaints submitted by active duty Air Force personnel during 1981, 1982, and 1983 will be examined to establish correlations between complaint rates and categories, and the variables of rank, age, sex, and years of service.

The data base revealed that field officers tended to complain significantly less than their percentage representation in the population and about the same things. The primary complaint category for field grade officers was base support, followed by personnel management. This was consistent for all three years. As may be expected, Colonels have the lowest complaint rate per 1000 of 2.3 in 1981, 4.8 in 1982, and 1.9 in 1983. Complaints by Colonels have never exceeded 1/3 of 1% of total complaints. Lieutenant Colonels have a similar complaint profile, with a complaint rate per 1000 of 4.5 in 1981, 5.8 in 1982, and 2.3 in 1983. Majors also have very small complaint rates per 1000 of 5.4 in 1981, 5.8 in 1982, and 4.7 in 1983.

Company grade officers tend to complain most about personnel management, with the second category being base support for Captains and human relations for Lieutenants. Captains, comprising the largest number of active duty commissioned officers, had complaint rates per 1000 of 6.8 in 1981, 6.6 in 1982, and 5.5 in 1983. Representing 6% of the total population, Captains submit complaints at half that rate. First Lieutenants had complaint rates per 1000 of 7.6 in 1981, 10.6 in 1982, and 8.3 in 1983. In 1982 and 1983, First Lieutenants had the highest rates for commissioned officers. Second Lieutenants tended to complain at a lower rate than First Lieutenants, except for 1981 in human relations and base support. Complaint rates per 1000 were 9.3 in 1981, 5.7 in 1982, and 5.9 in 1983.

Senior and mid-level noncommissioned officers (NCO) submitted most complaints in the personnel management category, followed by base support. Chief Master Sergeants had complaint rates per 1000 of 7.9 in 1981, 8.8 in 1982, and 8.7 in 1983. Although the complaint volume is low for Chiefs, the 1983 complaint rate of 8.7 was greater than that for an Airman First Class (8.3). The number of complaints submitted by Senior Master Sergeants was

practically parallel to their representation in the total population. Complaint rates per 1000 were 12.1 in 1981, 12.9 in 1982, and 10.2 in 1983. Master Sergeant complaint rates per 1000 showed a steady decrease from 14.4 in 1981 to 12.2 in 1982 to 9.5 in 1983. Technical Sergeant is the highest rank at which the percentage of total complaints exceed that ranks percentage representation in the total population. Complaint rates for Technical Sergeants were 16.3 in 1981, 15.0 in 1982, and 11.8 in 1983. Staff Sergeant complaint characteristics were the same as for Technical Sergeants, with rates per 1000 of 17.9 in 1981, 15.7 for 1982, and 12.2 in 1983.

For the Airman Basic through Sergeant ranks, the second highest complaint category shifts from base support to human relations. Sergeants and Senior Airman submitted the largest volume of complaints for all three years and had complaint rates of 17.8 in 1981, 16.6 in 1982, and 14.1 in 1983. Although the largest grade group for 1982 and 1983, Airman First Class submitted the less complaints per 1000 than all other enlisted ranks in 1983, and all but Chiefs in 1982. Airman First Class complaint rates were 15.8 in 1981, 10.3 in 1982, and 8.3 in 1983. The rank of Airman had the highest rate of any group for any year with a 1981 complaint rate of 18.9. The 1982 rate was 16.6, and 13.1 for 1983. Airman Basic data shows a swing in rates per 1000 from 14.9 in 1981 to 18.2 in 1982 and back down to 12.4 in 1983.

A review of the complaint statistics does reveal several consistencies in complaint behavior based on grade. Field grade officers submit the lowest volume of complaints and have the lowest complaint rates per 1000. Field grade officers submit more complaints in the base support category. Company grade officers have relatively low complaint rates, but begins the trend of having more complaints about personnel related matters. Senior NCOs complain usually at a lower rate than other NCOs and airmen. At the mid-level NCO ranks, complaint rates start to exceed population rates. The trend for each grade are fairly consistent with relatively small changes in percentages among complaint categories. Except for Second Lieutenants in 1981, and Airman Basics in 1982, the complaint pattern is similar for all three years - only the volume of complaints has changed between the years.

Accepting the assumption that age tends to increase with increased rank, complaint data based on age mirrors the pattern of that based on rank. Individuals 36 years of age and over have the lowest rates with 13.0 for 1982 and 10.9 for 1983. People aged 17-25 have the second lowest rates with 16.1 for 1982 and 11.6 for 1983. The 26-30 age group has the highest complaint rates of 16.5 for 1982 and 14.3 for 1983. In 1981, the trend was somewhat different in that the 17-25 age group had a higher rate (18.0) than the 31-35 age group (17.8). The 26-30 group was

still the highest with 19.3, and the 36 and over the lowest with 15.4. The higher complaint rate for the 17-25 age group correlates with the complaint rate for Airman in 1981. As previously mentioned, the 1981 Airman rate of 18.9 was the highest of all ranks for 1981, 1982, and 1983.

The complaint data did not reveal any significant deviations among major complaint categories based on sex. For all three years, the major category was personnel management, followed by human relations, base support, accounting and finance, miscellaneous, and legal. What was significant however, was the high female complaint rate per 1000. That rate was 24.5 in 1981, 22.9 in 1982, and 18.6 in 1983. What this suggests is that while females tend to complain in the same categories as males, they do so at a much higher percentage of their population. For the three year period, females represented approximately 11% of the total Air Force population and submitted nearly 19% of all complaints. The percentage of complaints by females in any category was consistently the highest in the human relations category.

An analysis of the complaints data keyed strictly to years of service revealed no significant insights not otherwise apparent through the rank and age data. The trend is that the number of complaints significantly reduce as time in service increases and base support matters tend to become more of an issue than human relations matters.



## Chapter Six

### TRENDS IN THE DATA BASE

The purpose of this chapter is to examine complaints by major category in order to determine whether the complaints data can be used to predict or identify problem areas based on trends of the major categories. Each major complaint category was analyzed based on the end of year complaint totals for 1976 through 1983.

The largest complaint category has always been personnel management. This is not surprising since that category contains subjects which have a direct impact on an individual's life and career - such as assignments and promotions. There were no discernable trends in that category which would distinguish it from any other category. As the total volume of complaints increased or decreased each year, there were some changes in the percentages of intermediate categories. For example, as total complaint volume decreased, complaints related to reenlistments almost doubled. The changes within the reenlistment category were spread across several sub-categories. While changes in the hundreds may be statistically valid at low confidence levels, changes of from 20 to 50 among several categories are less meaningful. Since 1978, complaints in the personnel management area have decreased sharply from a high of 6191 to 4057 in 1983. However, the personnel management category has changed very little when considered as a percentage of total complaints, never deviating by more than 5% in any one year since 1976. What this suggests is that the level of complaints in any category is more a function of general complaint activity than particular program problems.

The most significant change in complaints data occurred in 1980, when the human resources and base support categories changed places as the second highest complaint category. This shift occurred based on less than a 2% change in complaint rates within the two categories, which amounted to approximately 13 more human relations complaints a month.

The accounting and finance, miscellaneous, and legal categories showed general decreases in complaint volume, as did all categories, although the changes were rather small in total numbers. Since 1978, the legal category has not deviated by more than 1/2% as a percentage of total complaints. The miscellaneous

category has not varied more than .9%, and neither has accounting and finance. These categories historically reflect less increases and decreases in complaints volume.

The analysis of the major categories indicates that none of the categories tend to move in isolation of the others. When one category increases, others tend to do so. When one decreases, a declining trend is noted in the others. Despite the increases or decreases in volume, however, each of the categories tends to maintain the same general percentage of total complaints. Since all the categories tend to move jointly in the same direction in reaction to complaint volume, increases in complaints may not indicate that a certain program is a problem.

## Chapter Seven

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis conducted for this report, it does not appear that the IG complaints data base can be effectively used as a statistical tool for predicting potential problems in Air Force programs. The reasons for this conclusion are contained in the following paragraphs.

By its very nature, the IG complaints program is a corrective tool. Complaints are answered and problems solved before the data on the complaint is entered into the data base. Because each complaint is evaluated on its own merits, a large complaint volume is not necessary to validate the existence of a problem. One complaint can result in a major change to an Air Force program; this has occurred.

The IG complaints system surveys have indicated that an individual's likelihood to use the IG system is related to their knowledge about the system. All surveys have consistently pointed out that knowledge tended to increase with rank, and more junior airmen tended to know less and often nothing about the complaints system. Since the complaints data shows that the greatest volume of complaints comes from lower ranking personnel with less time in service, it is an open question as to whether the complaints rates would go up if the knowledge of lower ranking airmen was increased. This suggests that the data base may more accurately reflect knowledge levels of the IG system rather than existence of real or perceived problems.

Complainant profiles were shown to be consistent during 1981, 1982, and 1983, suggesting a general pattern based on rank. That same pattern was reflected by age, years of service, and sex. In all groups, the percentage of total complaints made in any category did not vary greatly regardless of the volume of complaints submitted.

Major complaint categories have remained relatively fixed as a percentage of total complaint volume since 1976. Although the volume of complaints have increased and decreased over the years, there has been little variance in the percent of the total which each category represents. All categories tend to move in the same direction at the same time. This suggests that complaints

are not necessarily a result of a program problem, but rather a propensity to complain caused by external factors. Since 1976, one factor which had some correlation with complaint activity was population size. For most years, when the Air Force population was decreasing, complaint levels increased. As the Air Force population increased, complaint levels tended to go down. Given the relative stability of each of the complaint categories when expressed as a percentage of total complaints, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the complaints volume is more directly related to the general satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the population and not to specific programs identified by complaints.

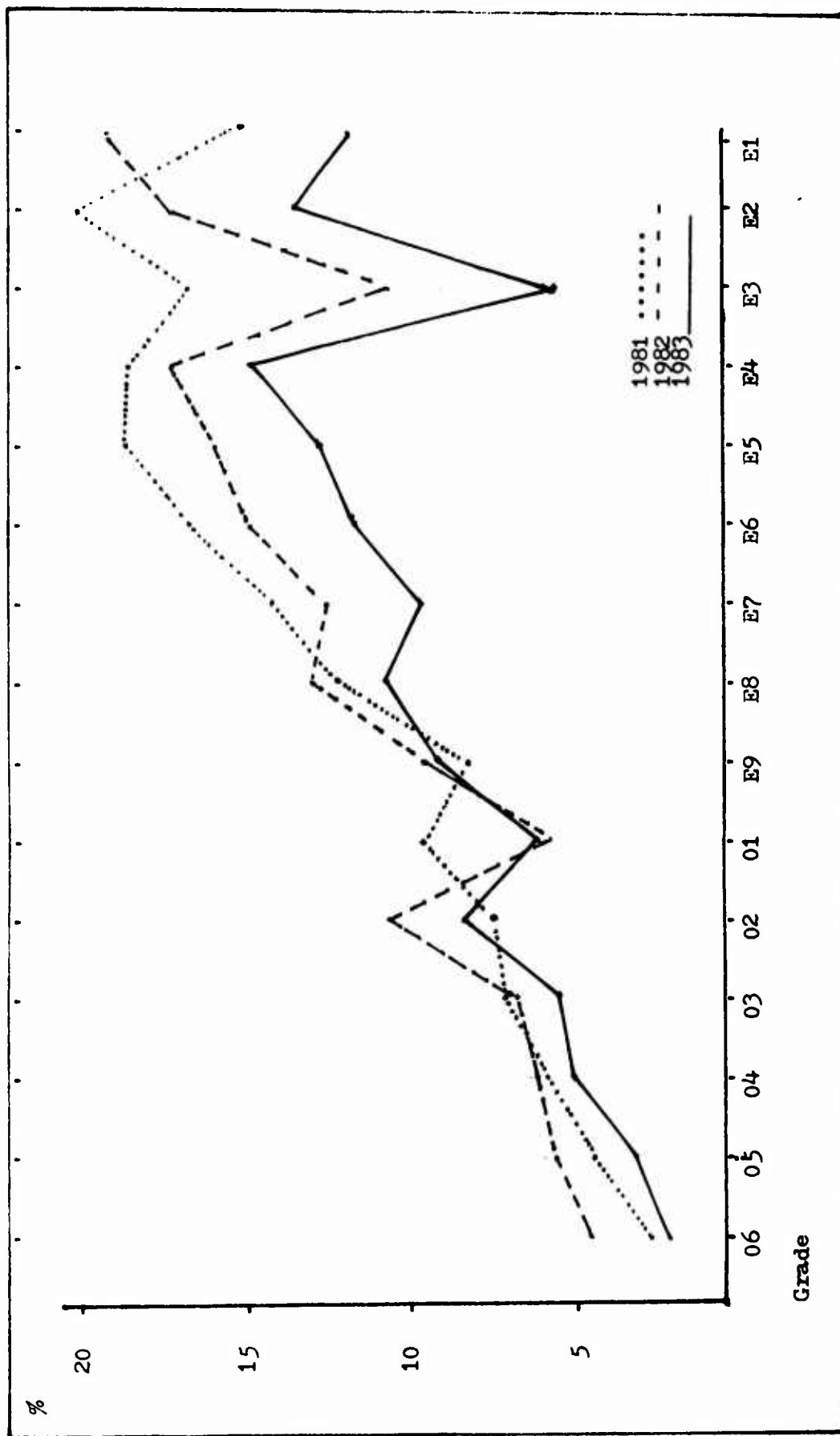


Figure 1. Complaint Rates/1000 By Grade.

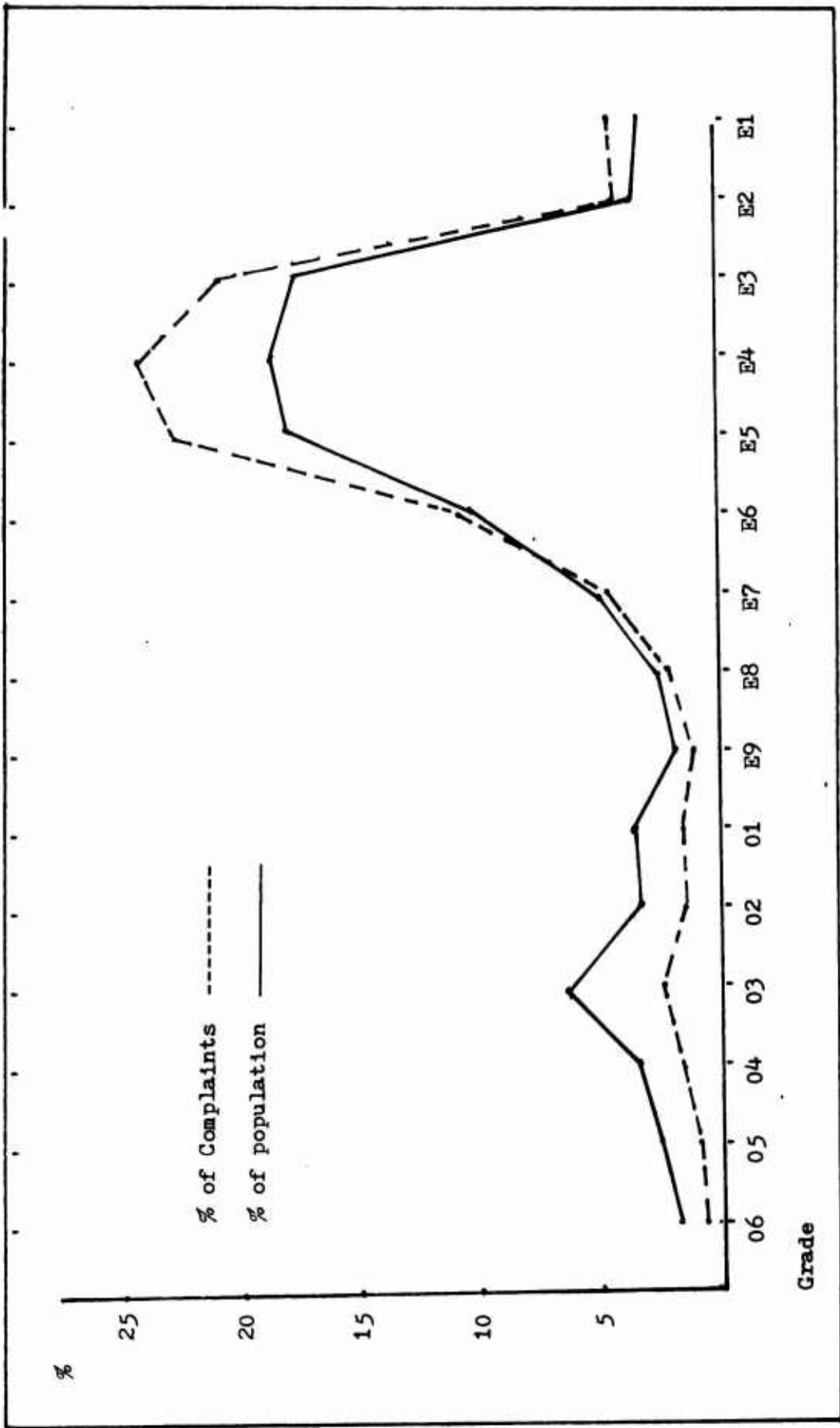


Figure 2. Percent of Total Complaints vs. Percent of Population By Grade.

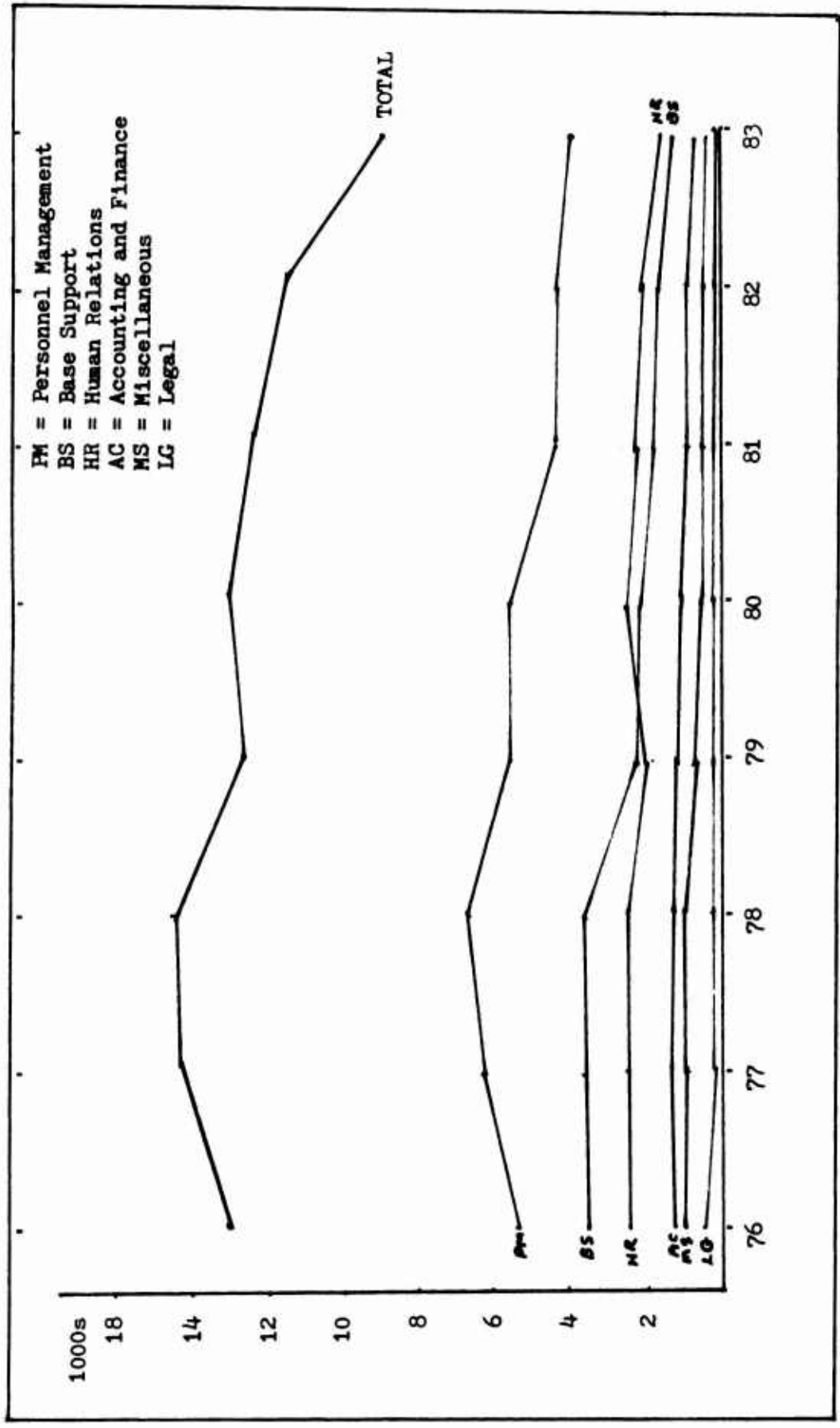


Figure 3. Complaint Trends by Major Categories.

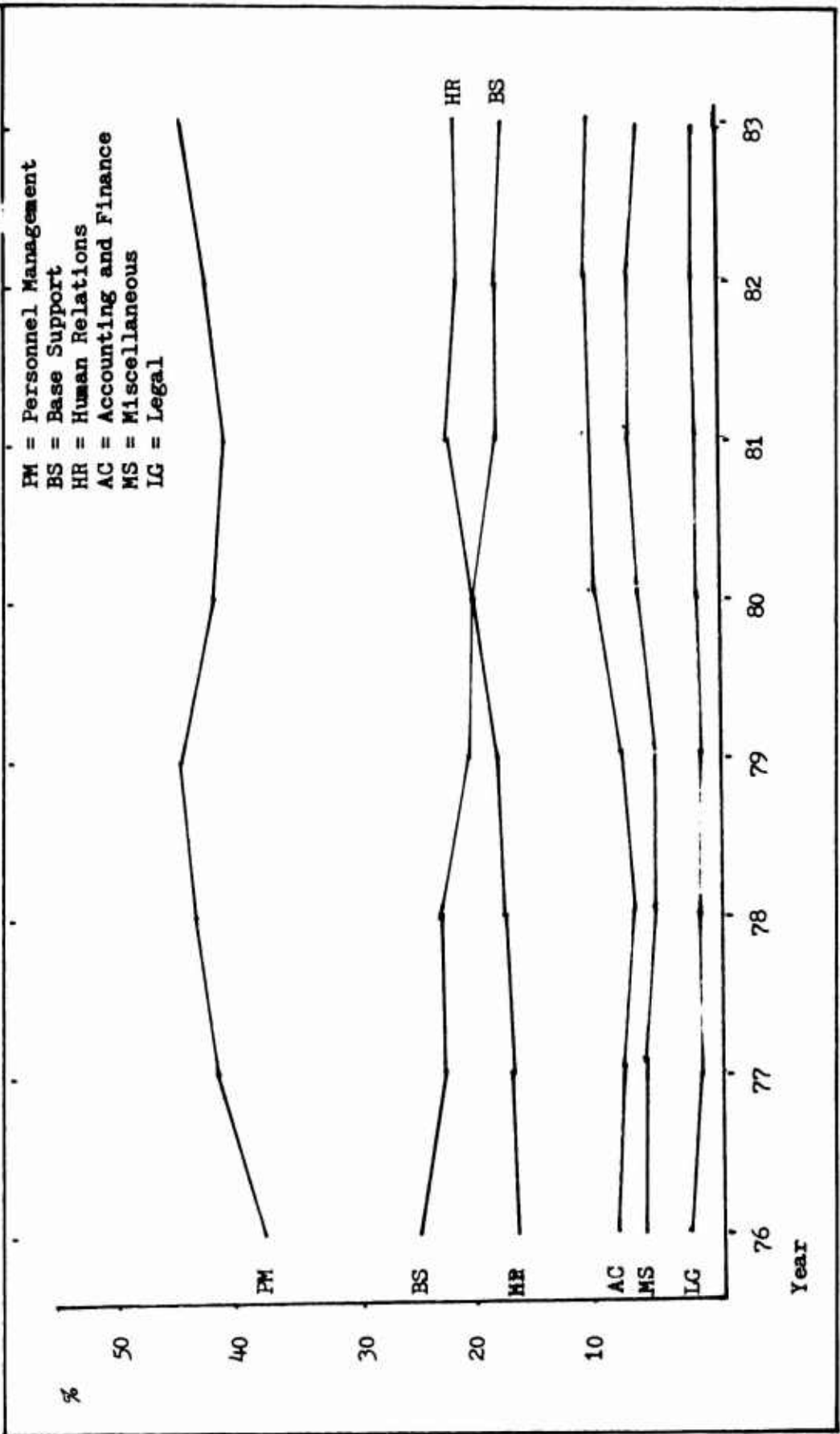


Figure 4. Complaint Categories As Percentage Of Total Complaints.



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