DETECTING CRACK HOUSES:

CITIZEN HOTLINE VS. POLICE OBSERVATION

A National Institute of Justice Research in Brief

by Lawrence W. Sherman

Anne E. Beatty

Dennis P. Rogan

Crime Control Institute

1063 Thomas Jefferson Street NW

Washington, DC 20007

tel 202-337-2700

In Collaboration With the Kansas City Police Department

Steven Bishop, Chief of Police

This research was supported in part by grants 90-IJ-CX-K002, 91-DD-CX-K015 and 92-IJ-CX-K035 to the Kansas City Police Department from the National Institute of Justice. Points of view or opinions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Justice or the Kansas City Police Department.

This report details several surprising findings about the detection and identification of illegal drug dealing locations in Kansas City, most of which are residential area "crack houses:"

- o 95% of the drug-dealing locations reported by citizens to the 24-hour a day police hotline in Kansas City, MO were not known as drug dealing locations by officers working the beats in which the drug markets were reported.

- o 84% of the locations identified by beat officers were not reported by citizens to the 24-hour hotline.

- o Locations identified by **both** officers and citizens were far more violent and troublesome than locations identified by one group alone.

- o Locations identified by either group were more violent and troublesome than city blocks not identified by either group.

The lesson for both drug enforcement and community policing is that information-sharing makes a great deal of sense. The idea that "everyone knows" where drug dealing is occurring, as a national columnist recently claimed, is certainly not true in Kansas City. Police and citizens can identify drug-dealing locations most accurately by working together.

CRACK HOUSES AND CRIME ON THE BLOCK

Crack houses, like taverns, appear to generate crime problems in their immediate micro-environments. While "hot spot" street addresses (Sherman, Gartin and Buerger, 1989) may produce the majority of the crime in a city, certain types of street addresses seem to raise crime levels on their surrounding blocks and beyond. Roncek and Maier (1991) report that blocks

with taverns in Cleveland have twice as many violent crimes and substantially more index crime in general, on average, as blocks without taverns, a relationship that holds up in multivariate models of block-level crime. Frisbie et al (1978: 229) found that assaults and other crimes are clustered within one-tenth of a mile around taverns in Minneapolis, with a steep distance-decay curve. Schools (Roncek and Faggiani, 1985) and fast food restaurants (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1982) show similar connections to higher crime in their micro-environments.

The logic of crack houses causing more crime on the block should be even clearer than it is for bars, schools and restaurants. Although Detroit crack dealers view crack houses as less violent marketplaces than open-air crack markets (Mieczkowski, 1992), the crack industry is generally far more violent than the distribution systems for earlier illegal drugs like heroin. This violence comes from several sources: self-selection and social selection of violent persons, use of weapons to intimidate workers, competitors, and neighborhood citizenry, and violence among crack-selling groups (Johnson, et al, 1990: 35-39). The dominant role of teenage operatives also enhances the level of violence, since they are heavily armed (Johnson, et al, 1990:36) and reputedly enjoy gratuitous violence (Mieczkowski, 1992: 161).

Even without these dramatic features of the crack trade, a crack house should generate at least as much trouble as a tavern: they both give rise to parking problems, romantic disputes, robbery of intoxicated or high patrons, prostitution, noise, loitering and auto thefts by patrons unwilling to walk home. These events may occur out on the sidewalk, street or alley just as easily as inside a crack house. The hypothesized role of the crack house in their etiology is based on the routine activities associated with such commerce, and requires no assumptions at all about the question of crack's pharmacological role in crime causation (Reiss and Roth, 1993: 194).

The micro-environmental crime problems of crack houses may be more difficult to measure than those of taverns or other legitimate facilities because crack house locations appear to be far less stable. Over an eighteen

month period in 1991-93, for example, citizens reported 4837 unique drug dealing locations in 8874 calls to the Police Department's 24-hour anonymous drug hotline. But 70% of those locations (3400) received only one complaint, suggesting that the tenure of the drug dealing was not long enough to generate repeat complaints (in sharp contrast to the local call distribution for taverns, which shows a high prevalence of repeat cases). Another interpretation of this finding, however, is measurement error in the caller's interpretations of observed activity.

THE KANSAS CITY DRUG HOTLINE

On August 1, 1990, Kansas City (Missouri) Police Chief Steven Bishop launched a 24-hour-a-day, 365 days a year drug hotline number, 474-DRUG. Citizens with information about the locations of retail drug dealing were invited to call that number, with their anonymity protected. They found their calls answered quickly by civilian police employees in the data entry section. These calltakers, trained in fill the data entry screen for the mainframe computer's DRAGNET (Data, Research and Analysis for Geographic Narcotics Enforcement Targets) data system, also serve as data entry staff for offense reports. They are quite enthusiastic about answering the hotline calls, as both an opportunity to participate in important work and as a diversion from their other tasks.

Under a grant from the National Institute of Justice, the Kansas City Police Department established the DRAGNET data base on the mainframe computer. Police officers throughout the department were given acces to it by terminals located at all patrol districts and several other police facilities. The system is tied into the geocoding file already on the mainframe for checking valid addresses, and automatically assigning census block, tract, and police sector and district data.

The importance of Kansas City's drug hotline is increased by the fact that most drug dealing locations in that city are indoors. A 1990 sample showed that 52% of alleged dealing locations were in houses, 23% were in

apartments, and 5% were in businesses. Only 6% were on the street. The inside locations make them harder to detect with great certainty, and raises the important question of where and how they can best be located.

FINDING DRUG HOUSES

A national columnist (Raspberry, 1990) recently observed that everyone "knows" where drugs are being sold. This common sense proposition may not be quite so easily demonstrated, as our comparison of police and citizen lists of drug-selling locations suggests.

Under an NIJ grant, the Crime Control Institute (CCI) examined the detection of crack houses in three phases. In the first phase, the CCI site manager rode with 24 police officers on evening shifts in the three inner-city patrol divisions in September of 1990, right after the 474-DRUG hotlione was established. She asked them to identify drug market locations by driving by them while she wrote down the addresses. In the second phase, CCI compared the calls for service activity at the citizen and police-identified locations. In the third phase, CCI compared the ongoing identification of drug locations in the hotline to the results of a monthly KCPD survey of knowledgeable officers.

The conclusion of these analyses is that independent evidence about active drug dealing is generally stronger at addresses identified by police than at the citizen addresses. Addresses named by both police and hotline sources, hwever, are clearly more of a problem for the neighborhood, as measured by the total volume of calls they receive.

Patrol Officer Lists

From August 1, 1990 to October 3, 90% of the 948 calls made to 474-DRUG concerned addresses located in just three of the five patrol divisions in Kansas City: East, Central, and Metro, the three inner city divisions. These divisions were the focus of the first validation phase, in which 24 patrol officers (two for each of the 12 patrol sectors) were asked to identify currently active drug dealing locations independently of any knowledge of the

list of addresses produced by the hotline calls. These interviews were conducted on evening shift patrol, from September 5 to October 5.

The 24 officers were selected in the following fashion. Each of the three divisions is divided into four geographic sectors, for a total of twelve sectors. CCI employed a quasirandom numbers generator to order the sectors in each division. The interviewer proceeded in the randomly assigned sequence, with the exception of the last two, whose order was reversed for reasons of scheduling difficulties in the station concerned. The first officer for each sector was picked the shift sergeant from the officers working that shift that evening. Ms. Beatty then rode with the officer until all drug houses of which the officer was aware had been identified.

At that point, a second officer was identified by the first officer in "snowball" sampling fashion. The second officer was someone the first officer thought was particularly knowledgeable about drug locations. On all but one occasion, the interviewer then transferred to the car of the second officer, and proceeded to take that officer's list. On one occasion, the second officer already had another passenger, so he could not transport the interviewer. After a discussion, he agreed to (and did) write out a list of the addresses of the locations he knew.

Each officer was asked to show or list the places in the sector where drugs were currently being sold. The places identified included houses, apartments, businesses and street corners. All places listed were either specific addresses or intersections. Where no specific address on a block could be identified, none was recorded. But when an officer claimed that every building in certain housing project was a drug location, each and every specific address he indicated was recorded. Indications of formerly but not currently active locations were excluded.

The criteria used for defining a drug location as currently active was left to the judgment of each officer. The level of evidence they employed clearly varied substantially, from direct observation of activity to information from a reliable informant.

The amount of information provided also varied widely by officer. Within the same sector, one officer identified three addresses; another identified 25 (Central Patrol Division). The range of locations named in the Metro Division was 2 to 24, and in East it was 4 to 15. The average number of locations identified by each officer was 14 in Central, 10 in Metro and 7 in East, which may reflect variations in the density of drug houses. The within-sector variation in officer information, however, seemed to reflect interests more than opportunity, since all but one of the officers had been working in the sectors for six months or more.

Given the variation in level of information among officers, it is not surprising that the level of agreement was low. Only 5 of the 110 addresses in Central patrol were named by more than one officer (4%); 7 of 71 (10%) in Metro and 6 of 47 (13%) in East. More important, however, is the question of whether officer-identified locations correspond to addresses reported to 474-DRUG.

Citizen and Officer List Overlap

By October 3, 1990, 474-DRUG received 939 citizen-generated calls about 517 addresses and intersections. Meanwhile, CCI's survey showed 226 addresses and intersections identified by the 24 police officers. The comparison was therefore a mutually exclusive listing of citizen and officer data. **The comparison showed that only 37 of the 706 unique addresses in the combined list were on both the police and 474-DRUG list, an overlap of only 5%.**

[Figure 1 about here]

In order to assess how much of the difference in the identification of drug locations was due to minor errors in street numbers, we compared the block level information as well. This was done by linking the identified addresses to calls for service data on those addresses. Where there were no calls for service, the address was coded as missing data for the block level analysis. This procedure caused relatively little attrition and virtually no difference in the rate of attrition, with 79% (407) of the 517 citizen

locations and 81% (183) of the 226 police locations successfully coded by block.

The block level analysis shows that little of the discrepancy between the two lists is due to minor differences in addresses. **Only 57 of the 423 uniquely identified blocks from both lists appear on both lists, for an overlap of 13%.** Police and citizens appear to be reporting different drug dealing locations not only by specific addresses, but also by the blocks on which drug dealing is allegedly occurring.

FINDING THE WORST DRUG HOUSES

The second phase of the validation of the 474-DRUG locations is an analysis of the calls for service for which cars were dispatched to those locations during the period August 1, 1990 to September 30. This analysis shows that at both the address and block levels, the POLICE list shows substantially more violent crimes and total activity than the CITIZEN list, but the BOTH list shows substantially more total police activity than the POLICE list alone.

A mean of four calls per address, or about one every two weeks, was dispatched to the CITIZEN list, while five were dispatched to the POLICE list and almost ten to the BOTH list. By Kansas City standards, each of the lists identified high activity addresses. Only 2.6% of all addresses city-wide had more than 4 calls dispatched during the same time period (the CITIZEN list average), and only 1.85% had more than 5 calls (POLICE mean). The BOTH list, however, was in the top 0.75% of addresses which had nine or more calls during that period (Table 4). The total of 78,279 calls city-wide over that time period translates to each address having a mean of .475 calls. Being on the CITIZEN list elevates the mean call level by a factor of 9, while being on BOTH lists elevates it by a factor of 20.

The rate of violent crime calls per address (.30) is almost twice as high at the POLICE addresses as at the CITIZEN addresses (.17). The violent crime rate at the BOTH (.27) and POLICE addresses are substantially the same. With a city-wide mean of .020 violent crime offenses per address during that period, the CITIZEN list was also about nine times higher and the POLICE list 15 times higher.

The address-specific conclusions were also tested at the block level, since we expected crack houses to increase crime on the block. The results show that the benefits of using BOTH data compared to POLICE alone are even greater at the block level than at the specific address level. There is a slight increase in the violent crime average for the BOTH list (1.86) over POLICE (1.81) at the block level, compared to a slight decrease at the address level. There is also a greater proportionate increase in average total calls per address at the block level, from 58 calls per block for POLICE to 100 for BOTH (and 46 for CITIZEN).

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 puts the block-level data into perspective. It reflects the fact that the average volume of calls at the 57 BOTH blocks puts them in the top one half of one percent of all blocks in the city for this time period. This compares to the top 2% for the POLICE list and the top 3% for the CITIZEN list. All three lists, then, are validated as indicating some of the most active blocks in the city in terms of total calls for service.

The total calls for service on the blocks identified through all three lists, in fact, produced 26.5% of all calls for which block data were available (N = 68,568). Similarly, they produced 21% of all violent crimes reported city-wide during that period for which block-level data were available (N = 2734). When we consider that the 423 blocks identified constitute only 6% of the estimated 6953 blocks in the city, it is striking to see how large a proportion of violence and total calls is in such close proximity to the alleged drug locations.

ONGOING COMPARISON

The initial comparison of citizen and police detection of crack houses has been largely validated over time, although the overlap has increased somewhat. In the 20 month period from May of 1991 through December of 1992, a monthly survey of knowledgeable patrol officers in the three affected precincts was conducted by the DRAGNET project sergeant. Polling them by telephone, he asked them to identify the current drug-dealing locations by address. He then entered these data in the DRAGNET system as officer-supplied information. In addition, officers would occasionally call 474-DRUG themselves to report addresses. The combined officer lists were compard to the citizen lists with the following results:

- o 14,661 drug activity entries were made on DRAGNET
- o 6,742 unique addresses were identified
- o 894 addresses lacked data on who called
- o 5,848 addresses provided data on police or citizen source
- o 4,837 addresses were identified by citizens
- o 1,900 addresses were identified by police
- o 889 of the 5,848 (15%) were identified by both
- o 3,948 of the 4,837 (82%) were identified by only citizens
- o 1011 of the 1900 (53%) were identified by only police

[Figure 3 about here]

Using the 5,848 unique addresses with identified sources, Figure 3 shows the distribution of detection sources in percent. Once again, we conclude that both police and citizen detection efforts are needed to provide full intelligence on retail narcotics activity.

These data can also be used to estimate the number of active drug locations in Kansas City in any given month. Figure 4 shows that the number of calls to 474-DRUG and the number of unique addresses identified by one or more calls has varied somewhat across the seasons, but has stayed within a fairly stable range for an extended period. A substantial decline in these trends over time could indicate either a reduced level of citizen concern (or

hope) about residential drug dealing locations, or a real decline in the prevalence of retail drug dealing locations. Whichever interpretation one may put on the trend, it is certainly an indicator well worth monitoring in order to track the quality of life in a city.

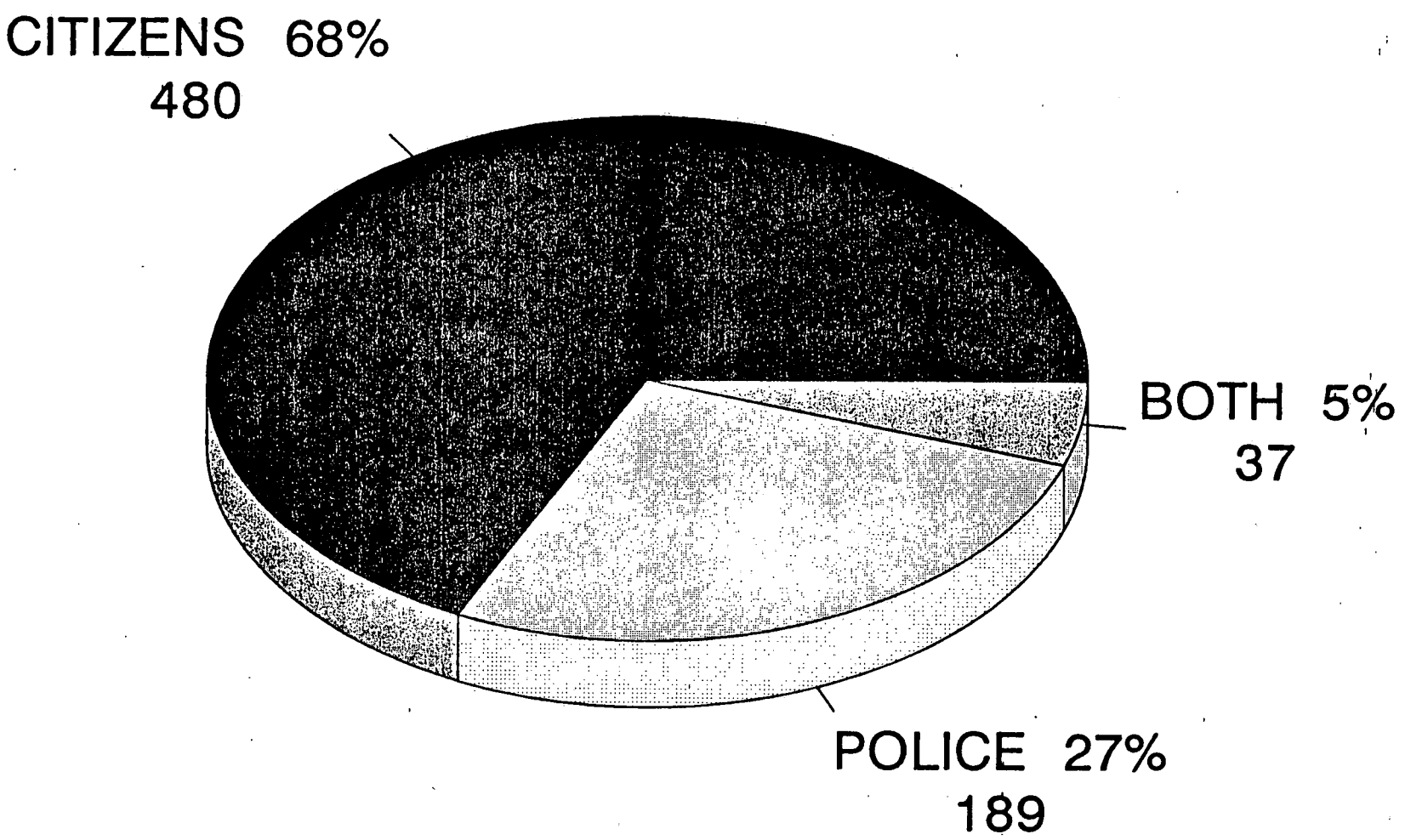
[Figure 4 about here]

SETTING UP A DRUG HOTLINE

What does a drug hotline cost? Not much. Any community with 24 hour police staff and a personal computer could easily do it. An inexpensive data base program and someone with basic computer skills could produce the same data as presented here, even in smaller cities. The most important element is probably an easy to remember telephone number, such as 474-DRUG. The right to use this number was actually given to the Kansas City (Mo) Police Department by a local business man who had reserved it from the telephone company with this idea in mind. Since telephone companies are generally quite public-servic minded, asking for their cooperation should be well worth the time invested.

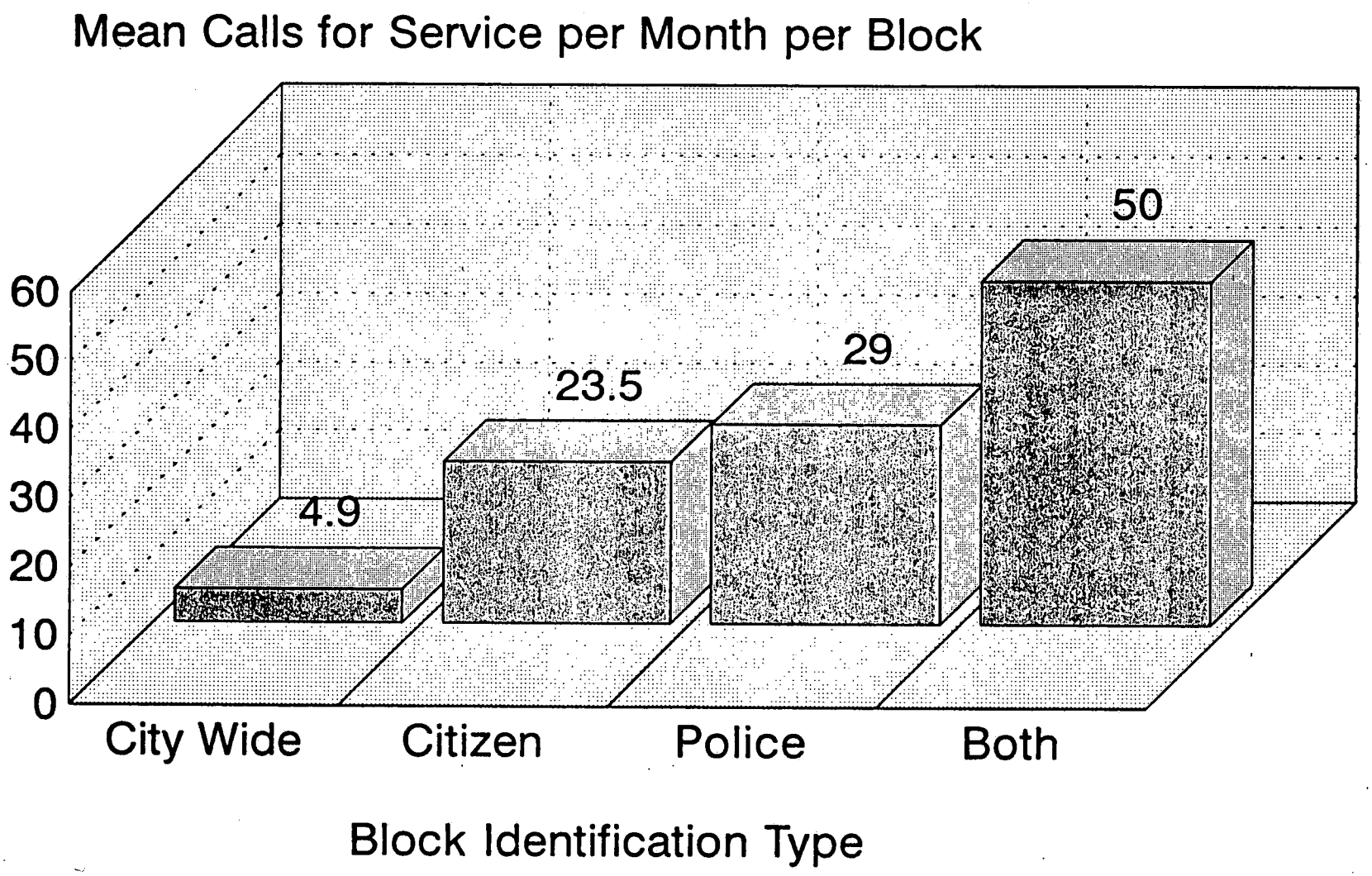
Figure 1

Citizen and Police Reported Drug Locations 474-DRUG Hotline
Between August 1, 1990 and September 30, 1990



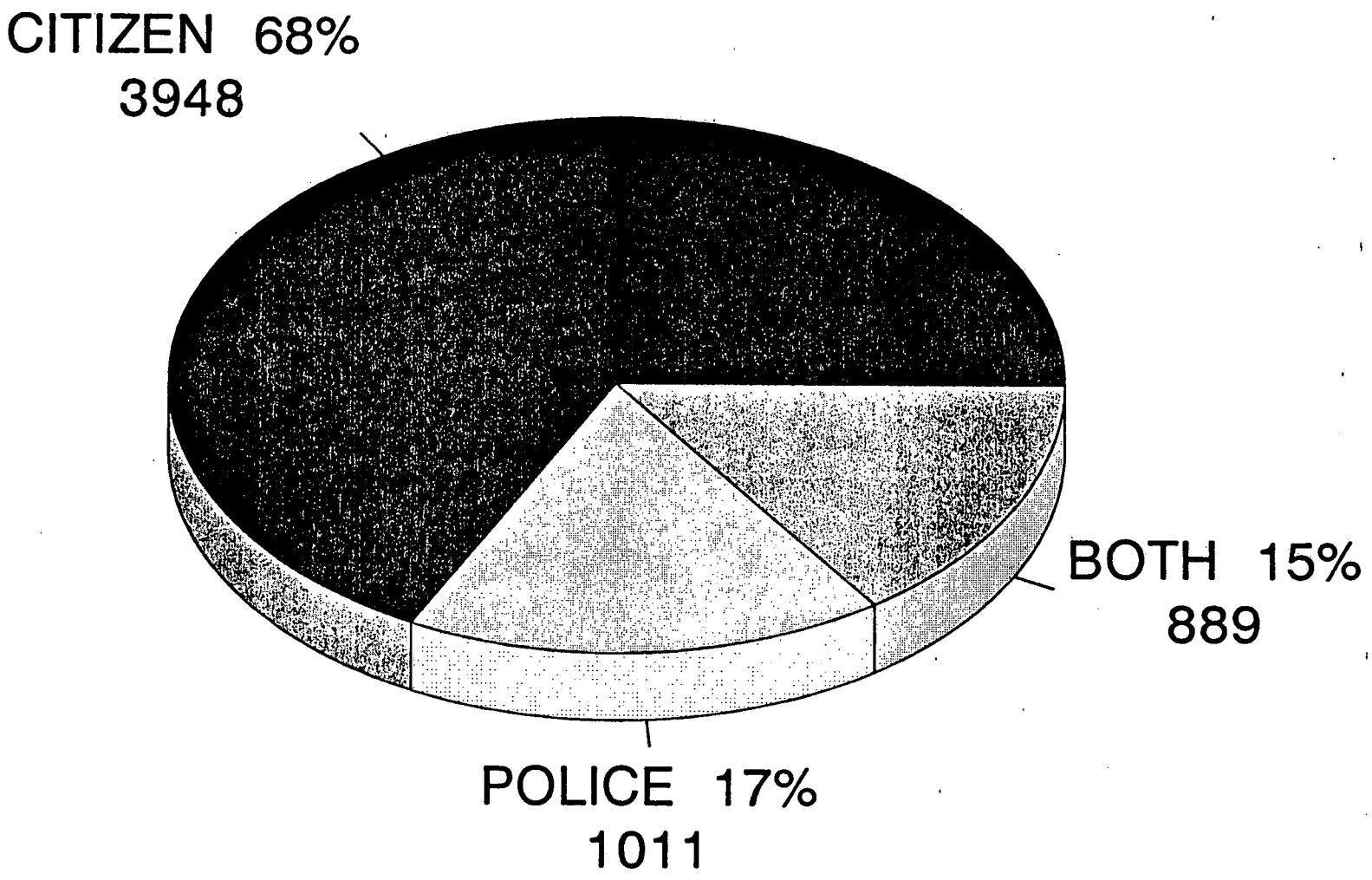
Distribution of Citizen and Police Drug Reports

Figure 2
Mean Calls for Service per Month per Block



City Wide -Identified by Dispatcher
Citizen -Identified by Citizens
Police -Identified by Police

Figure 3
Citizen and Police Reported Drug Locations 474-DRUG Hotline Between May 1, 1991 and January 3, 1993



Distribution of Citizen and Police Drug Reports

Figure 4
Distribution of 474-DRUG Calls by Month For Total Calls and Unique Addresses