

# elements of change

highlighting trends and issues in the criminal justice system

VOL. 4 / NO. 3

## Findings from the Annual DCJ Criminal Justice Database Project



This issue of Elements of Change is devoted to data that were collected through the annual Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) Criminal Justice Database Project. Since 1982, DCJ has annually dispatched a crew of researchers to collect data on a sample of adult criminal filings from district court files. The database contains several hundred variables, including information on charge and conviction, disposition, placement, sentence, criminal history, victim, and demographic information about the offender. The on-site collection consists of a 20% sample of felony cases filed in nine of Colorado's 22 judicial districts.\* The jurisdictions contained in this sample represent over 70% of the state's population.

Selected findings from the 1993-1997 Criminal Justice Database follow.

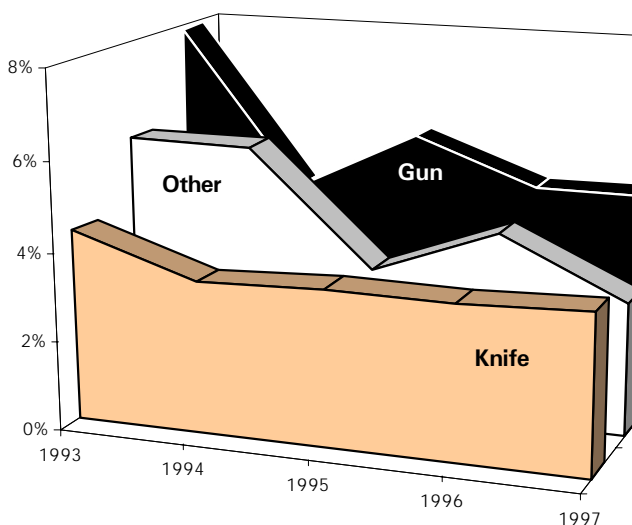
### IN THIS ISSUE:

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- ▣ Placement by Most Serious Offense Charged
- ▣ Behavior Severity Score by Placement
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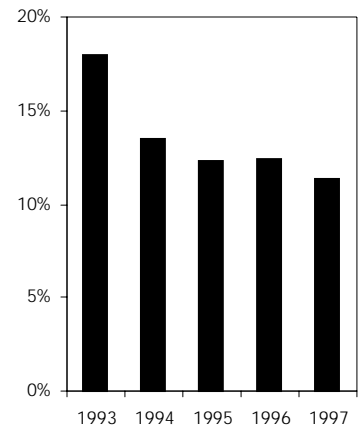
## Weapon Use Decreasing within the Criminal Justice Database Sample

- ▣ Overall weapon use during the commission of a crime dropped from 18% in 1993 to 11.3% in 1997.  →
- ▣ Gun use during the commission of a crime decreased from 7.9% in 1993 to 4.7% in 1997.  ↓

Percentage of Crimes Where a Weapon Was Used: Gun vs. Knife vs. Other Weapons



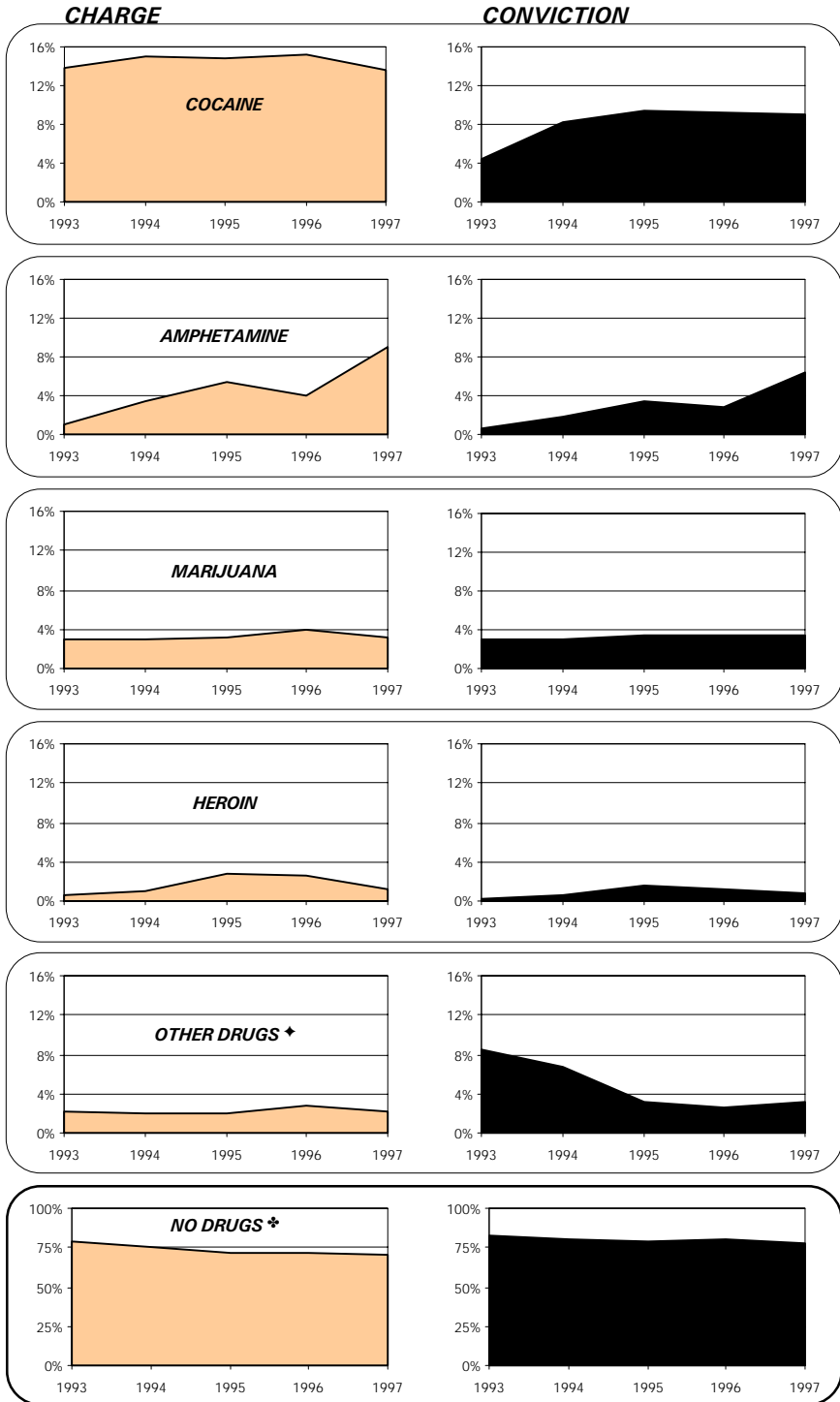
Percentage of Crimes in the Criminal Justice Database Where a Weapon Was Used



\* Annually, DCJ collects data on-site from a 20% sample of felony cases filed in nine of Colorado's 22 judicial districts (in the counties indicated). The nine judicial districts represented in the Court Database are: 1st (Jefferson County), 2nd (Denver), 4th (El Paso County), 8th (Larimer County), 10th (Pueblo County), 17th (Adams County), 18th (Arapahoe County), 19th (Weld County) and the 21st (Mesa County). For the filing year 1998, the sample will be expanded to include Boulder District Court.

DCJ Criminal Justice Database

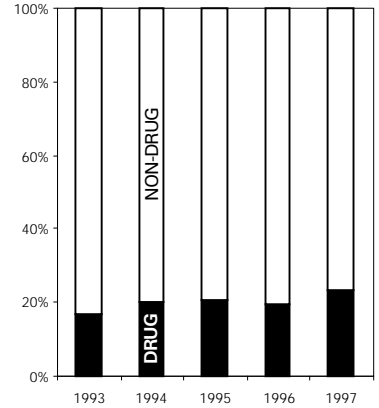
# Drug Charge vs. Conviction, 1993-97



Note: The last two graphs are sized at a different scale than the rest of the graphs (100% instead of 16%) due to the much larger number of cases in this category (non-drug related charges and convictions).

## Conviction Crime, 1993-97: Drug Crimes vs. Non-Drug Crimes

Drug crime convictions increased as a percentage of total convictions (from 17% in 1993 to 23% in 1997).



### A Few Comments about Drug Charge vs. Conviction:

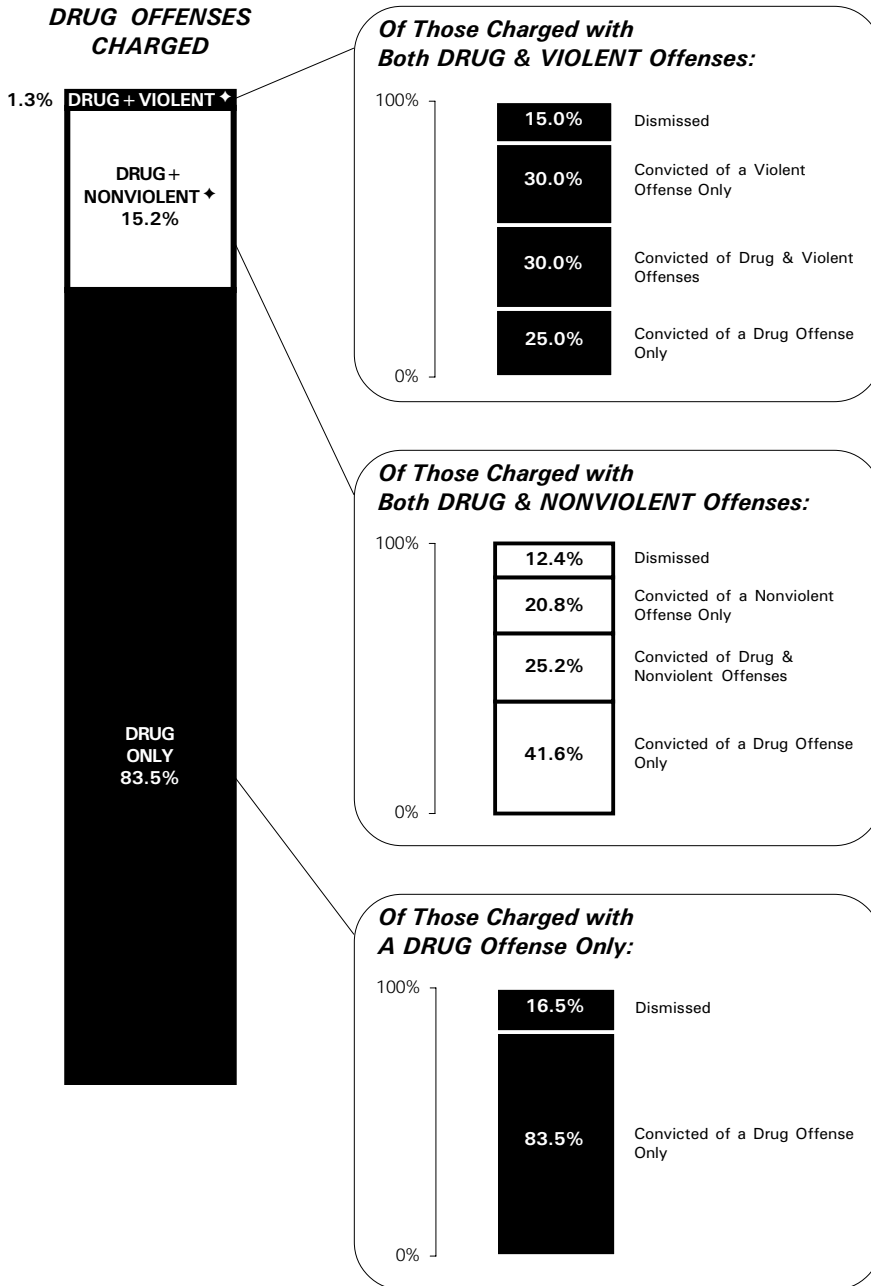
- Overall, the conviction rate was lower than the charge rate for COCAINE, AMPHETAMINE, and HEROIN. In general, the conviction rate was higher than the charge rate for the OTHER DRUGS and NO DRUGS categories. MARIJUANA posted similar rates for charge and conviction.
- Between 1993 and 1997, DISMISSED cases accounted for 11.6%, 7.1%, 5.1%, 5.5%, and 4.1%, respectively, of all drug cases charged. These could be cases dismissed either before or after the hearing process. (Dismissed cases are separate from non-drug cases.)
- After the Denver Drug Court was implemented (1994), a significantly larger proportion of Denver cases received dispositions for drug crimes consistent with their original charge, rather than a lesser charge. For example, in 1993, only 20.9% of offenders charged with a cocaine offense received a disposition for a cocaine offense. In 1995, 92% of cases charged with cocaine crimes received a disposition for cocaine crimes. See OTHER DRUGS conviction graph to the left for possible impact of these sentencing practices.

† OTHER DRUGS includes prescription drugs as well as hallucinogens, opiates, & diazepam.  
 ‡ NO DRUGS includes all charges and convictions not related to drug crimes

DCJ Criminal Justice Database

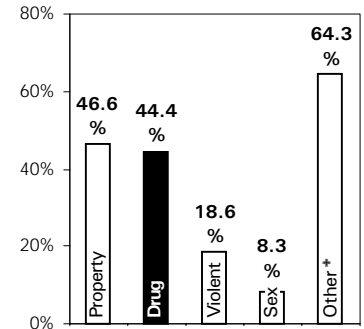
# 1997 Drug Offenses Charged and Convicted

The Division of Criminal Justice Criminal Justice Database contains the three most serious offense charges filed for each arrestee in a sample of cases filed in Colorado (see **Source** below for a description of the sample). The illustration below depicts, for persons in the sample charged with felony drug offenses, or charged with drug plus violent or nonviolent offenses, what the case outcome was.\*



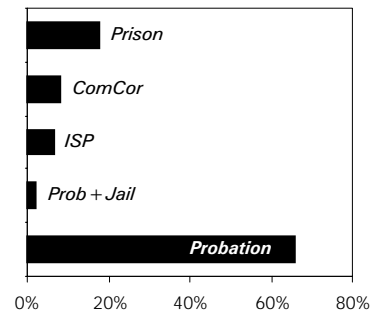
## Charges Filed in Colorado by Offense Category, 1997

Offense categories NOT mutually exclusive (the three most serious offenses were recorded for each person in the sample, resulting in possible overlap in type of charge)



\* OTHER: Category primarily comprised of habitual traffic offender, menacing, escape, bribery, and criminal impersonation.

## Criminal Justice Placement When a Drug Crime Was the Most Serious Offense Charged, 1997



\* This analysis was also run on the 1994 DCJ Criminal Justice Database sample. The 1997 findings are similar to the 1994 findings. See *Elements of Change*, January 1997, for the 1994 analysis.

† Note: VIOLENT = assault, vehicular assault, menacing, extortion, reckless endangerment, homicide, kidnapping, robbery. NONVIOLENT = burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, forgery, fraud.

Source: DCJ's 1997 Criminal Justice Database. Annually, DCJ collects data on-site from a 20% sample of felony cases filed in nine of Colorado's 22 judicial districts (in the counties indicated). The nine judicial districts represented in the Court Database are: 1st (Jefferson County), 2nd (Denver), 4th (El Paso County), 8th (Larimer County), 10th (Pueblo County), 17th (Adams County), 18th (Arapahoe County), 19th (Weld County) and the 21st (Mesa County). These jurisdictions represent approximately 75% of Colorado's population.

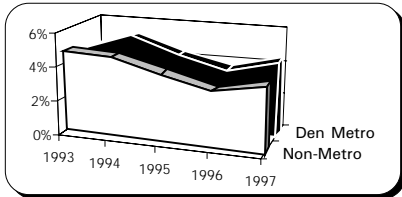
DCJ Criminal Justice Database

# Most Serious Offense Charged, Denver Metro vs. Non-Denver Colorado, 1993-97\*

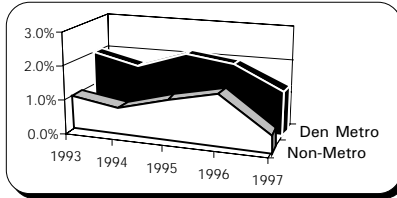
■ The DENVER METRO area drives charges in four offense categories -- homicide, sex crime, robbery, and drug crime (shown in boxes with shadows). NON-DENVER Colorado drives charges in the rest of the major offense categories.\*

NOTE: Scales vary on the graphs on this page. Also, DENVER METRO is always represented in black and NON-DENVER by white.

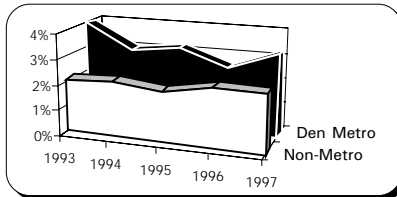
**SEX CRIME**



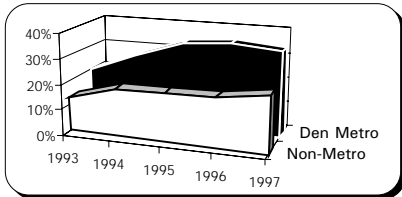
**HOMICIDE**



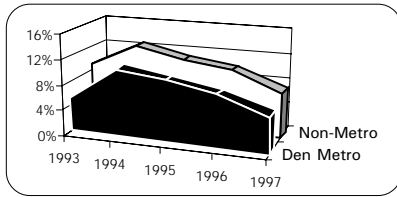
**ROBBERY**



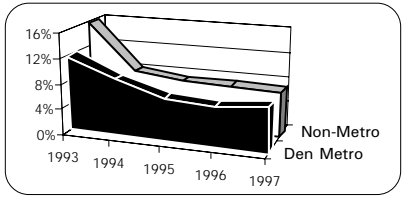
**DRUG CRIME**



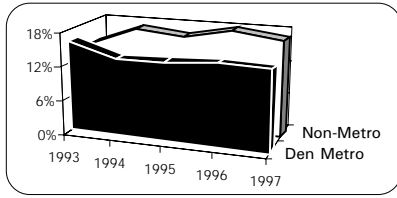
**ASSAULT**



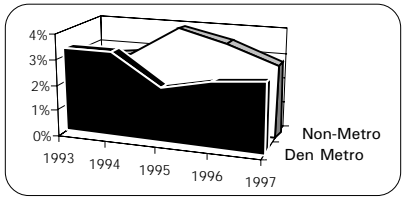
**BURGLARY**



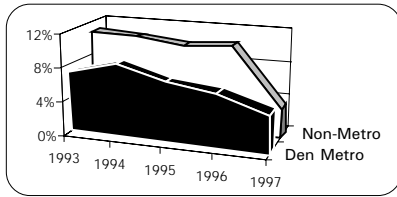
**THEFT**



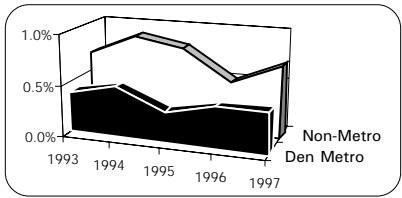
**AUTO THEFT**



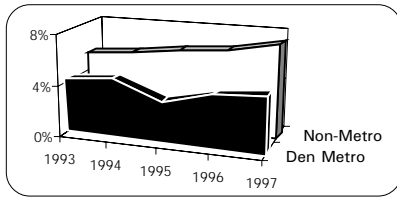
**FORGERY/FRAUD**



**WEAPONS**



**TRESPASS/TAMPERING/MISCHIEF**



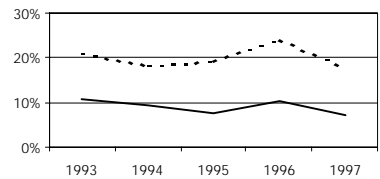
## Most Serious Drug Offense Charged, Denver Metro vs. Non-Denver, 1993-97\*

- Cocaine and heroin offenses accounted for a higher proportion of the charges in the DENVER METRO area counties.
- Marijuana and amphetamines accounted for a higher proportion of the charges in the NON-DENVER metro area counties.

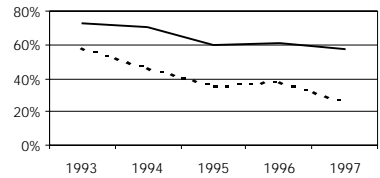
KEY

Non-Denver (dotted line)  
Denver Metro (solid line)

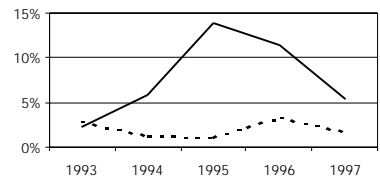
**MARIJUANA**



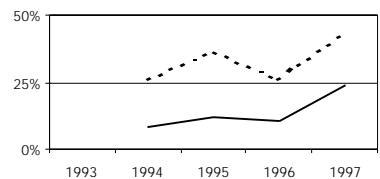
**COCAINE (powder and crack)**



**HEROIN**



**AMPHETAMINE †**



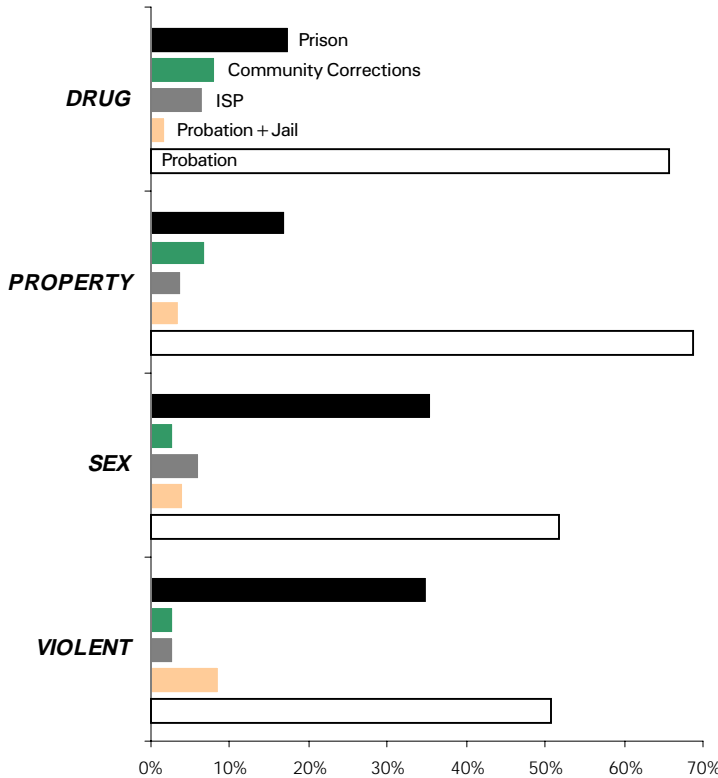
\* For purposes of this comparison: DENVER METRO = Adams, Arapahoe, Denver, and Jefferson Counties. NON-DENVER = El Paso, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld Counties.

† AMPHETAMINE was not a separate drug category in 1993.

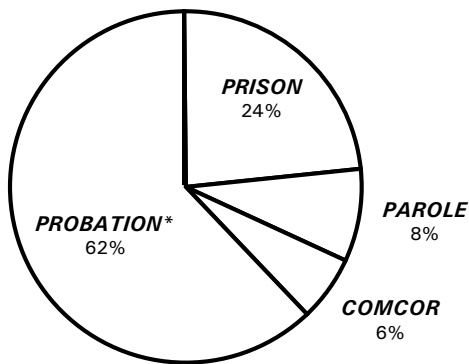
DCJ Criminal Justice Database

### Criminal Justice Placement by Most Serious Offense Charged, 1997

Although we are only looking at 1997 data here, the numbers and proportions were similar for the years 1993 - 1996.



### Colorado Correctional Populations as of July 1999



Note: These proportions and percentages are approximate -- intended only to relay the general relationship between the major correctional populations. Due to reporting methods, some subpopulations may be counted more than once.

\* PROBATION includes ISP and specialized programs (Denver Drug Court, SDOP, FOP).

Source: Quarterly Colorado Correctional Populations Report, July 1999, prepared by the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice

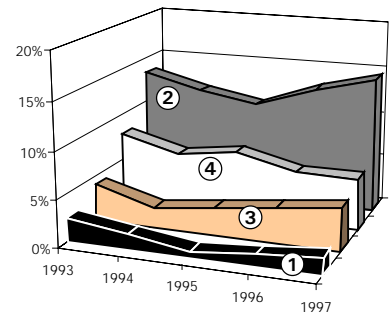
### OFFENDER BEHAVIOR SEVERITY Probation vs. Prison Placements

Following are the Behavior Severity Classification categories ranked from most serious to least serious:

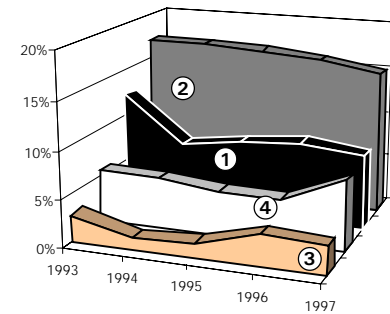
- (MOST SERIOUS)
- 1 Life threatening aggression/death
  - 2 Physical aggression
  - 3 Aggression against property
  - 4 No verbal or physical aggression

- (LEAST SERIOUS)
- The predominant classification category for both probation and prison placements was PHYSICAL AGGRESSION.
  - LIFE THREATENING AGGRESSION/DEATH was the least common classification for probation placements, but the second most common classification for prison placements.
  - Offender representation in the categories of AGGRESSION AGAINST PROPERTY and NO VERBAL OR PHYSICAL AGGRESSION was similar for probation and prison.

### Behavior Severity Classification for Offenders Sentenced to PROBATION



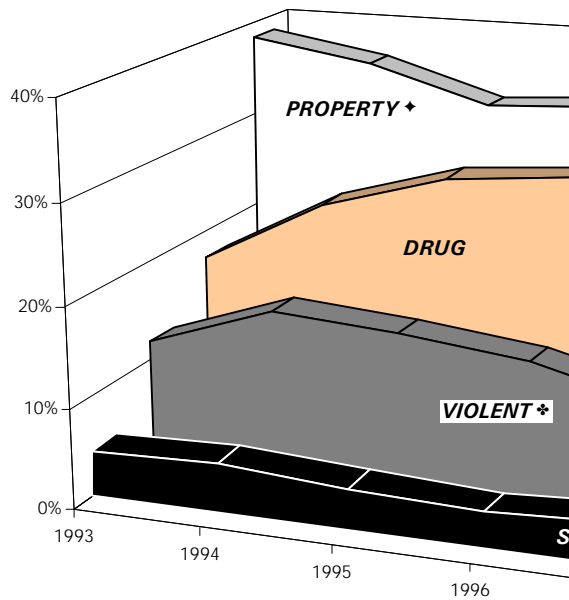
### Behavior Severity Classification for Offenders Sentenced to PRISON



**DCJ Criminal Justice Database**

**Crime Trends, 1993-97:**

Most serious offense charged grouped by offense category. Percentage each offense category represented of the total Criminal Justice Database sample for each year. \*



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\* Note: Percentages for the four crime categories do not total 100%. An OTHER category is not shown. The OTHER category includes all offenses (primarily habitual traffic offender, menacing, escape, bribery, and criminal impersonation) not captured by one of the four categories shown in the graph  
 ♦ PROPERTY crime includes burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, and forgery/fraud.  
 ✚ VIOLENT crime includes murder, robbery, and assault.

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