Chapter 6 — DOC Demographic Characteristics

This chapter illustrates the demographic characteristics of both new prison commitments and the existing inmate population, as well as their recent patterns of change. The chapter examines new commitments to prison and the prison inmate population with respect to gender, age, and ethnicity. First, demographic characteristics of new prison commitments are analyzed followed by those of the overall inmate population.

Following are highlights from this chapter:

- both new prison commitments and the existing inmate population continue to be overwhelmingly male at around 90 percent. New commitments and prison incarceration rates for males are nearly ten times those of females. Although females comprise around ten percent of new prison commitments and inmates, these are growing rapidly;

- the average age of inmates continues to increase because of longer sentences; likewise, the most rapid growth in new commitments during the last five years was among 35- to 49-year olds; and

- minorities continue to have higher prison incarceration rates for both the inmate and new commitment populations relative to Anglos. New commitment and prison incarceration rates for Blacks are nearly ten times those of Anglos.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW PRISON COMMITMENTS: GENDER, AGE, AND ETHNICITY

This section profiles new prison commitments relative to Colorado's population and analyzes trends in the characteristics of new commitments between FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99. During FY 1998-99, there were 4,833 commitments to the DOC for new crimes. These new prison commitments differed significantly from the state's overall population in such demographic characteristics as gender, age, and ethnicity.

Gender: The Vast Majority of New Prison Commitments are Male

In FY 1998-99, 89.3 percent of new prison commitments in Colorado were male and 10.7 percent were female (Table 6.1). While the proportion of male and female commitments has remained fairly stable since FY 1994-95, the steady increase in female commitments — from 8.4 percent of new commitments in FY 1994-95 to 10.7 percent in FY 1998-99 — is significant. The increase represents the trend of an increased percentage of female felony convictions receiving prison commitments. We forecast that this trend will continue. Since there are roughly equal numbers of males and females in the state's population, these figures also indicate a male prison commitment rate that is approximately ten times that for females.

Table 6.1: New Commitments by Gender

	FY 1994-95		FY 1996-97		FY 1998-99	
Gender	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total
Male	3,523	91.6%	4,235	90.5%	4,318	89.3%
Female	323	8.4%	443	9.5%	515	10.7%
Total	**3,846**	**100.0%**	**4,678**	**100.0%**	**4,833**	**100.0%**

Source: Department of Corrections.

Age: New Commitments are Primarily in Their Early Thirties

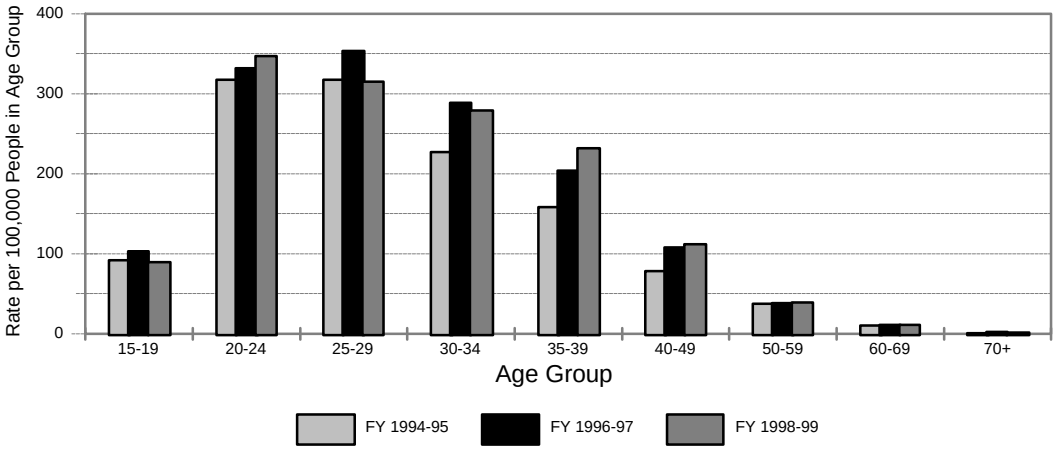
The age distribution of new commitments to prison also differs greatly from that of the Colorado population as a whole because criminal activity is not evenly distributed across people of different ages. The average age of a new prison commitment in FY 1998-99 is 31.8 years. Table 6.2 and Graph 6.1 compare the number of prison commitments per 100,000 Colorado residents in various age ranges for FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99. Several significant characteristics stand out:

- Offenders age 20 to 29 comprised 39.7 percent of new prison commitments in FY 1998-99 versus 44.0 percent of the new commitment population in FY 1994-95. Despite this continuing decline, this age group has the highest incarceration rate of any age group — 331.6 prison commitments per 100,000 state residents. Historically, commitment rates have tended to peak in the 20- to 29-year old age group and then decline rapidly among people in their 30s and 40s. Since FY 1996-97, commitment rates have continued to peak for 20- to 29-year olds. However, the commitment rate does not decrease dramatically until age 50 and above.
- Between FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99, the overall commitment rate per 100,000 residents rose 13.6 percent, from 132.7 commitments per 100,000 residents to 150.8 commitments per 100,000 residents.

Table 6.2: New Commitments by Age

	FY 1994-95			FY 1996-97			FY 1998-99		
Age	Number	Percent of Total	Rate per 100,000	Number	Percent of Total	Rate per 100,000	Number	Percent of Total	Rate per 100,000
15-19	244	6.3%	91.7	295	6.3%	103.3	274	5.7%	89.8
20-24	865	22.5%	317.6	958	20.5%	332.0	1055	21.8%	346.8
25-29	827	21.5%	317.9	917	19.6%	353.7	865	17.9%	314.7
30-34	746	19.4%	227.0	906	19.4%	288.8	833	17.2%	278.8
35-39	552	14.4%	157.9	733	15.7%	203.7	838	17.3%	231.9
40-49	458	11.9%	78.3	690	14.8%	107.7	764	15.8%	111.7
50-59	127	3.3%	37.8	144	3.1%	38.3	170	3.5%	39.3
60-69	25	0.7%	10.1	29	0.6%	11.4	30	0.6%	11.4
70+	2	0.1%	0.8	6	0.1%	2.2	4	0.1%	1.4
Total	**3,846**	**100.0%**	**132.7**	**4,678**	**100.0%**	**153.7**	**4,833**	**100.0%**	**150.8**

Graph 6.1: Prison Commitment Rate by Age
(Number of New Prison Incarcerations per 100,000 Residents)



Source: Department of Corrections.

Ethnicity: Minorities Have Higher Incarceration Rates for New Prison Commitments Than Anglos

The ethnicity profile of new prison commitments also differs significantly from the overall Colorado population, as shown in Table 6.3 and Graph 6.2. The primary characteristic that stands out is the higher new commitment incarceration rate of minorities than that of Anglos relative to the state's overall population. Still, the largest share of new commitments are Anglo. The following points summarize the main highlights of Table 6.3 and Graph 6.2:

- Between FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99, the number of new Anglo prison commitments rose 38.8 percent (from 1,640 to 2,277), the number of Black prison commitments rose 4.8 percent (from 920 to 964), and the number of Hispanic prison commitments rose 29.6 percent (from 1,113 to 1,442).

- The prison commitment rates (new commitments per 100,000 residents) of Colorado's three largest ethnic groups differed greatly. The commitment rate for Blacks (553.7 per 100,000 Black residents) in FY 1998-99 was eight times the rate for Anglos (72.3 per 100,000 Anglo residents). The commitment rate for Hispanics (244.0 per 100,000 Hispanic residents) in FY 1998-99 was four times the rate for Anglos.

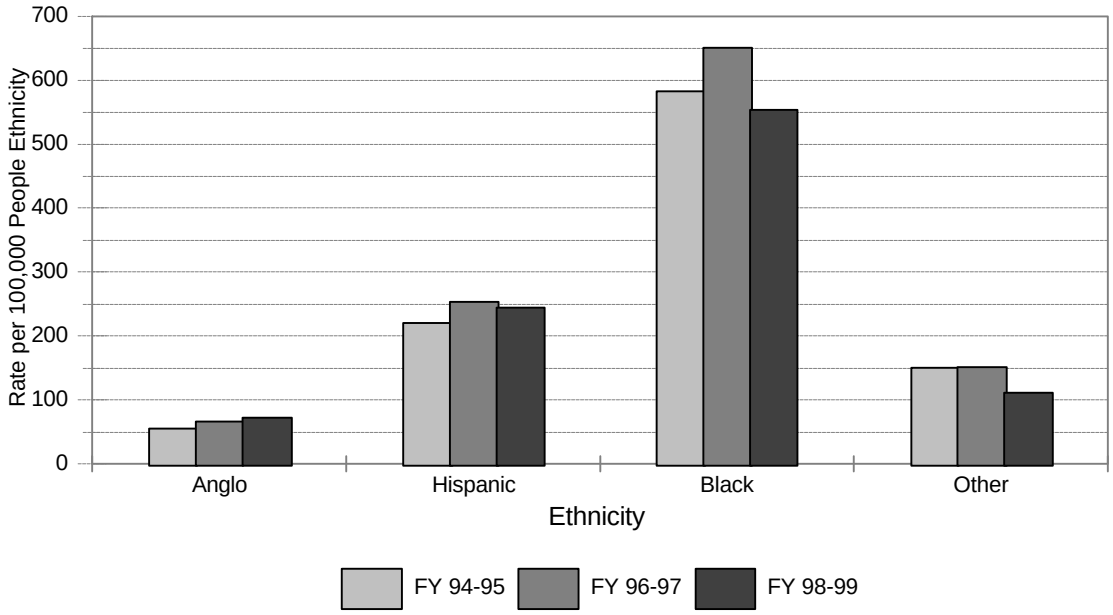
- Between FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99, the commitment rate per 100,000 state residents rose for Anglos. While the commitment rate per 100,000 has historically grown for minorities, the rate decreased from FY 1996-97 to 1998-99. For Hispanics, the commitment rate dropped from 253.4 to 244.0; for Blacks the rate dropped from 650.6 to 553.7 and for other minorities, the rate dropped from 151.1 to 111.2.

Table 6.3: New Commitments by Ethnicity

	FY 1994-95			FY 1996-97			FY 1998-99		
Ethnicity	**Number**	**Percent of Total**	**Rate per 100,000**	**Number**	**Percent of Total**	**Rate per 100,000**	**Number**	**Percent of Total**	**Rate per 100,000**
Anglo	1,640	42.6%	55.6	2,036	43.5%	66.7	2,277	47.1%	72.3
Hispanic	1,113	28.9%	220.8	1,381	29.5%	253.4	1,442	29.8%	244.0
Black	920	23.9%	582.4	1,073	22.9%	650.6	964	19.9%	553.7
Other	173	4.5%	150.7	188	4.0%	151.1	150	3.1%	111.2
Total	**3,846**	**100.0%**	**104.1**	**4,678**	**100.0%**	**121.4**	**4,833**	**100.0%**	**120.4**

Source: Department of Corrections.

Graph 6.2: Prison Commitment Rate by Ethnicity
(Number of New Prison Incarcerations per 100,000 Residents)



Source: Department of Corrections.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRISON INMATE POPULATION: GENDER, AGE, AND ETHNICITY

This section profiles Colorado's inmate population and analyzes trends in the characteristics of the inmate population between FY 1994-95 and FY 1996-97. Where appropriate, this section draws comparisons between the demographic characteristics of new prison inmates and those of the total inmate population.

As of June 30, 1999, the DOC jurisdictional population was 14,585. Colorado prison inmates differ significantly in such demographic characteristics as gender, age, and ethnicity from the state's overall population.

Gender: Most Colorado Inmates are Male

Table 6.4 examines the Colorado inmate population by gender between FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99. Several characteristics of inmates and trends with respect to gender are as follows:

- At the end of FY 1998-99, 92.1 percent of Colorado's prison inmates were male and 7.9 percent were female. The female percentage is up from the end of FY 1994-95 when it stood at 6.3 percent. Between FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99, the female inmate population rose at an average annual rate of 17.0 percent (from 616 to 1,157), while the male inmate population rose at an average annual rate of 8.4 percent (from 9,184 to 13,428).

- Females comprise a smaller percentage of the inmate population than new commitments. In FY 1998-99, 7.9 percent of inmates were female, while 10.7 percent of new commitments were female. This disparity is due to women being committed to prison for somewhat different types of crimes, generally fewer violent crimes than men. These types of crimes for which females are convicted generally have shorter sentences and shorter lengths of stay in prison.

Table 6.4: Gender of the DOC Inmate Population and Colorado's Population

	DOC Inmate Population FY 1994-95		Colorado Population FY 1994-95	DOC Inmate Population FY 1996-97		Colorado Population FY 1996-97	DOC Inmate Population FY 1998-99		Colorado Population FY 1998-99
Gender	**Number**	**Percent of Total**	**Percent of Total**	**Number**	**Percent of Total**	**Percent of Total**	**Number**	**Percent of Total**	**Percent of Total**
Male	9,184	93.7%	49.6%	11,442	92.9%	49.6%	13,428	92.1%	49.7%
Female	616	6.3%	50.4%	875	7.1%	50.4%	1,157	7.9%	50.3%
Total	**9,800**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**12,317**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**14,585**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Department of Corrections.

Age: The Average Age of Inmates is Increasing

Table 6.5 displays the average age of the inmate population. The primary characteristics of the inmate population with respect to age are as follows:

- At the end of FY 1998-99, the average age of male DOC inmates was 34 and the average age of female DOC inmates was 35 (Table 6.5). This represents an increase of three years for males and four years for females since the end of FY 1986-87. The main reason the average inmate age has increased is the result of inmates entering prison with longer sentences and staying in prison longer today than in the mid 1980s.

- The average age of the inmate population is greater than that of the new commitment population (34 years versus 31.8 years).

Table 6.5: Average Age of Inmate Population by Gender

Gender	FY 1986-87	FY 1988-89	FY 1990-91	FY 1992-93	FY 1994-95	FY 1996-97	FY 1998-99
Male	31	32	32	32	34	34	34
Female	31	33	33	33	34	34	35
Total	**31**	**32**	**32**	**32**	**34**	**34**	**34**

Source: Department of Corrections.

Ethnicity: Minorities Have Higher Incarceration Rates Among Inmates than Anglos

The profile of the prison inmate population also differs from that of the overall Colorado population in terms of ethnicity, as shown in Table 6.6 and Graph 6.3. As was the case with the ethnic distribution of new prison commitments, the most noticeable feature of the inmate ethnic profile is the higher incarceration rate of minorities relative to Anglos. Once again, although minorities have a higher incarceration rate relative to their share in the state's population than Anglos, Anglos comprise the largest share of the inmate population. The following points summarize the prominent data regarding inmate ethnicity:

- There was significant growth in the inmate population for all three ethnic groups, with Hispanic inmates registering the strongest growth. During this period between FY 1994-95 and FY 1998-99, the number of Anglo inmates rose 51.8 percent (from 4,400 to 6,680), the number of Black inmates rose 35.4 percent (from 2,489 to 3,369), and the number of Hispanic inmates rose 57.8 percent (from 2,578 to 4,069).

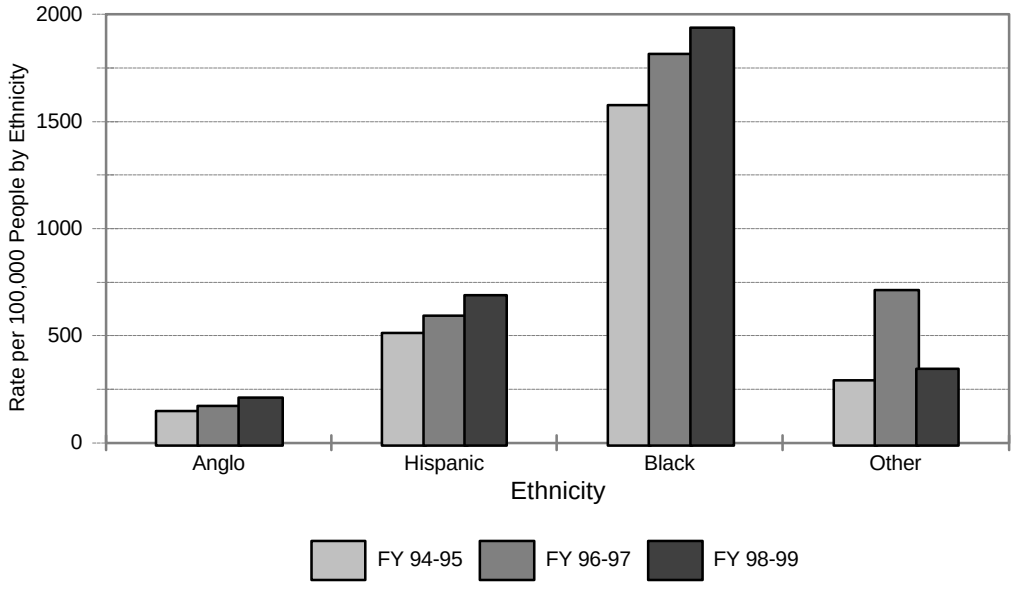
- The incarceration rates of Colorado's three largest ethnic groups differ greatly. The prison incarceration rate among Blacks (1,935.3 per 100,000 Black residents) at the end of FY 1998-99 was 9 times the rate among Anglos (212.1 per 100,000 Anglo residents). The incarceration rate among Hispanics (688.6 per 100,000 Hispanic residents) as of June 30, 1997, was more than three times the rate among Anglos.

- The prison incarceration rates per 100,000 residents by ethnicity shown in Graph 6.3 are approximately three times the new commitment rates per 100,000 residents shown in Graph 6.2 for all three ethnic groups. This reflects both the increase in admissions and the fact that average length of stay of prison inmates is longer than one year.

Table 6.6: Ethnicity of Inmate Population

Ethnicity	FY 1994-95			FY 1996-97			FY 1998-99		
	Number	Percent of Total	Rate per 100,000	Number	Percent of Total	Rate per 100,000	Number	Percent of Total	Rate per 100,000
Anglo	4,400	44.9%	149.2	5,210	42.3%	170.8	6,680	45.8%	212.1
Hispanic	2,578	26.3%	511.5	3,227	26.2%	592.1	4,069	27.9%	688.6
Black	2,489	25.4%	1575.5	2,993	24.3%	1814.8	3,369	23.1%	1935.3
Other	333	3.4%	290.0	887	7.2%	713.1	467	3.2%	346.3
Total	**9,800**	**100.0%**	**265.2**	**12,317**	**100.0%**	**319.8**	**14,585**	**100.0%**	**363.5**

Graph 6.3: Prison Inmate Population: Incarceration Rate by Ethnicity
(Number of Inmates per 100,000 Residents)



Source: Department of Corrections.