



# Bureau of Justice Statistics

## Executive Summary

October 1999, NCJ 179011

# Sheriffs' Departments, 1997

### Personnel

- As of June 1997, sheriffs' departments had an estimated 263,427 full-time employees, including about 175,000 sworn personnel. Total employment was up by an average 4.4% per year since 1993, compared to 3.1% per year from 1987 to 1993.
- Racial and ethnic minorities comprised 19% of full-time sworn officers in sheriffs' departments in 1997. This compared to 16.9% in 1993, 15.5% in 1990, and 13.4% in 1987.
- Nearly all officers worked for departments that used criminal record checks (99%), background investigations (98%), driving record checks (95%), and medical exams (92%) to screen applicants. Psychological (75%), aptitude (69%), and physical agility (59%) tests were also widely used.

• In 1997, 1% of departments required a 4-year degree of new deputy recruits and 7% a 2-year degree. Overall, 11% of departments required new deputy recruits to have completed at least some college course work in 1997, up from 7% in 1993.

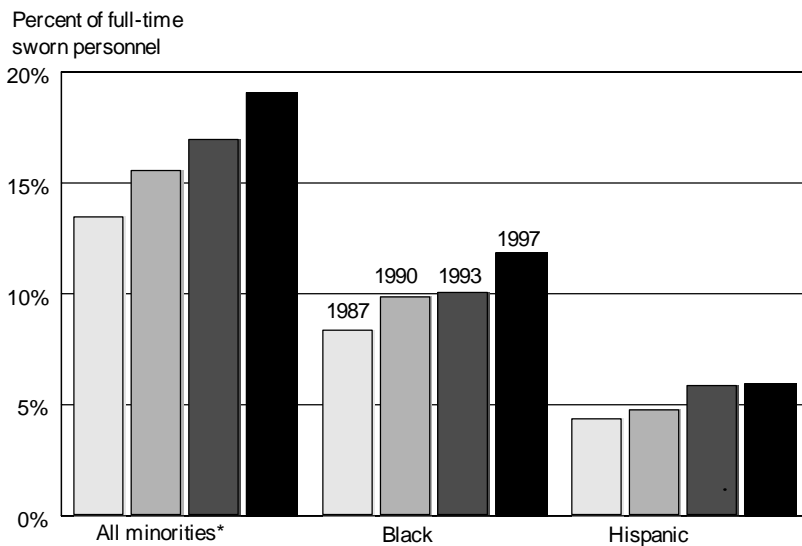
• Field and classroom training requirements for new deputy recruits averaged more than 800 hours combined. Three-fourths of departments required deputies to complete in-service training

as well, with a median annual requirement of 20 hours.

### Expenditures and pay

- Sheriffs' departments had total operating expenditures of \$13.1 billion during fiscal 1997, 10% more than in 1993 after adjusting for inflation. Expenditures averaged \$73,000 per sworn officer, and \$49 per resident.
- Starting salaries for deputies averaged about \$26,000, ranging from an average of \$19,400 in the smallest counties to \$30,200 in the largest. Nationwide, 48% of sheriffs' deputies worked for a department that authorized collective bargaining.

**Minority sheriffs' officers, 1987, 1990, 1993, and 1997**



\*Includes blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and Alaska Natives.

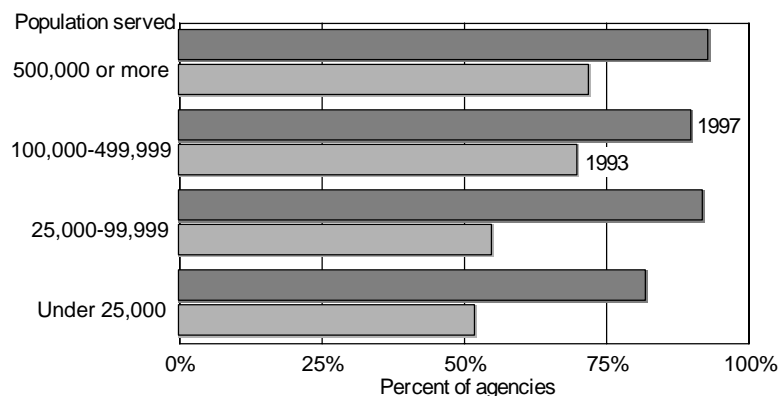
## Operations

- A large percentage of sheriffs' departments performed basic law enforcement functions such as providing routine patrol services (98%), responding to citizen calls for service (95%), investigating crimes (91%), and enforcing traffic laws (84%).
- Most sheriffs' departments had drug enforcement responsibilities (87%), and just over half of them, employing 80% of all officers, had drug asset forfeiture receipts during fiscal 1997.
- About a third had officers assigned full-time to a drug enforcement unit (3,500 officers), and half had officers assigned to a multi-agency drug task force (2,900 officers).
- In addition to traditional law enforcement duties, nearly all sheriffs' departments were responsible for performing court-related functions such as serving civil process (98%) and providing court security (95%). Eighty percent operated a jail.
- About 5 in 6 sheriffs' departments participated in a 9-1-1 emergency telephone system during 1997, compared to 4 in 6 during 1993. In 1997, 51% of the departments had enhanced 9-1-1 systems (capable of pinpointing the source of a call automatically) compared to 36% in 1993.

## Community policing

- Thirty-four percent of sheriffs' departments serving a population of 250,000 or more had a formal written community policing plan. Overall, about 3 in 4 sheriffs' officers worked for a department with some type of community plan.
- Thirty-five percent of departments serving a population of 100,000 or more had a community policing unit with full-time personnel. Another 16% had personnel who were designated to perform community policing activities but were not part of a separate unit.

**Sheriffs' departments authorizing the use of pepper spray by officers, 1993 and 1997**



- During the 3-year period ending June 30, 1997, about half of sheriffs' departments trained at least some of their in-service officers (55%) and new officer recruits (47%) in community policing. Twenty-nine percent reported all new recruits received such training.
- About 5 in 6 sheriffs' departments met with community groups during the 12-month period ending June 30, 1997. More than a fourth had formed problem-solving partnerships through written agreements (29%).
- About 3 in 8 sheriffs' departments had deputies assigned full-time as school resource officers. Nationwide, about 2,900 deputies worked as school resource officers during 1997.

## Equipment

- Ninety-five percent of sheriffs' departments, employing 98% of all sheriffs' officers, authorized the use of semiautomatic sidearms in 1997. These percentages represented increases over the 1993 figures of 82% and 91%.
- In 1997, nearly all sheriffs' departments authorized the use of nonlethal weapons by officers. From 1993 to 1997, the percent authorizing pepper spray increased from 56% to 87% while the percentage authorizing batons remained at about 80%.

- Thirty-nine percent of sheriffs' departments required all of their regular field officers to wear protective body armor while on duty in 1997, up from 30% in 1993.

- Nationwide, sheriffs' departments operated approximately 97,000 cars during 1997, or about 54 per 100 officers. About a third of these cars were unmarked.

- Nearly a third of sheriffs' departments were using boats in 1997, including about half of those serving a population of 50,000 or more. Small percentages used airplanes (4%) or helicopters (4%).

### Computers and information systems

- Ninety-three percent of sheriffs' departments used computers in 1997, compared to 82% in 1993. In 1997, 29% of departments, employing 66% of all officers, used mobile computers or terminals in the field compared to 17% and 50% in 1993.

- In 1997, about 3 in 4 sheriffs' departments maintained computerized information on warrants (75%), arrests (74%) and incident reports (74%). About 3 in 5 had files on calls for service (60%), criminal histories (60%), and stolen property (59%).

- In nearly 1 in 8 departments, officers could access vehicle and driving records by computer while in the field. This was the case in about half of the departments serving a population of 250,000 or more.

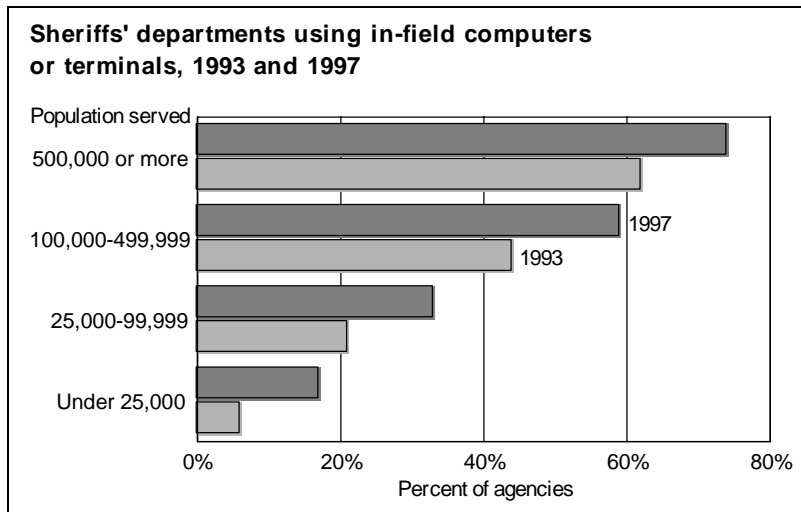
- About 7 in 8 sheriffs' departments transmitted criminal incident field data to a central information system through paper reports in 1997. The remainder used other methods such as laptop download, disk transfer, wireless transmission, or telephone lines.

### Written policy directives

- Nearly all sheriffs' departments (93%) had a written policy on pursuit driving. Most (57%) limited vehicle pursuits according to specific criteria such as speed or offense. About 30% had a policy that left the decision to the officer's discretion. Five percent discouraged all vehicle pursuits.

- Ninety-one percent of sheriffs' departments, employing 99% of all officers, had a written policy on the use of deadly force. Eighty-four percent, employing 90% of all officers, had a policy on the use of nonlethal force.

- Eighty-five percent of sheriffs' departments had a policy on handling domestic disputes. Most also had a policy on handling juveniles (83%) and mentally ill persons (67%).



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