

Profile and Projection of Drug Prosecutions
Jurisdiction Report
ALBERTA

by
Nathalie L. Quann, M.A.
Kwing Hung, Ph.D.

Research and Statistics Division
Department of Justice Canada

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Highlights for Alberta

- In 1998, there were 3,504 adults charged by the police with a drug offence, accounting for 9.2% of Canada, same as its population share of 9.6%.
- From 1977 to 1998, the **number of adults charged** with a drug offence decreased by 67% from 10,619 adults charged in 1977 to 3,504 adults charged in 1998. However, the trend has been levelling in the last few years.
- In terms of **types of drugs**, there had been a stable number of adults charged with a cannabis offence in the late 1970s – early 1980s. Since 1982, it has been on a downward trend. In contrast, there had been a large increase in the number of adults charged with cocaine offences in the mid- 1980s. A slight increase has also been reported in the number of adults charged with miscellaneous drug offences in the past 20 years. However, heroin offences recorded a considerable decrease over the past 20 years.
- In terms of **nature of offence**, drug possession now accounts for 54% of all adults charged with drug offences. The remaining 46% involve trafficking, cultivation and importation of drugs. The proportion of drug possession has remained rather stable in the last few years.
- A comparison between the number of adults charged with drug offences and the number of drug cases handled in **Alberta provincial criminal courts** reveals that for every 100 adults charged, about the same number of cases end up in courts.
- Based on the **extrapolation method of projection** selected, the number of adults charged with drug offences will increase about 4% in the next five years, increasing from 3,504 in 1998 to 3,658 in 2003.

Background

In September 1996, the Agent Affairs Unit of the Criminal Law Branch within the Department of Justice requested the Research and Statistics Division to analyze the level of drug offences in the past and to make future projections. The purpose was to provide information to facilitate discussions relating to volume and case management of drug cases.

This is an update of that project. There are two products in the project: a national report and a series of jurisdictional reports. The reports provide information on historical profile of the trend of drug offences in the past 20 years plus a five-year projection of the trend into the future.

Data Sources

The profiles and projections were based on police reported data collected by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. The period of data used was from 1977 to 1998, the latest data available. As the objective is to produce indicators of workload in drug prosecutions, data on the number of adults formally charged by the police are used.

These data were collected by the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) which represents the crime data of every police force in Canada. The data from this survey are the most current and reliable data on drug offences that are available in Canada today. [At the request of the Agent Affairs Unit, the number of drug offences here include only those under the Narcotic Control Act (NCA), excluding those under the Food and Drugs Act (FDA).]

In addition to police data, we look at some data from provincial criminal courts as collected by the Adult Criminal Court Survey (ACCS). However, the data are at the present incomplete, with data from 9 jurisdictions representing 80% of the national total number of cases. Data from British Columbia, Manitoba and New Brunswick are not yet available.

Profile of Historical Trends (Figures 1-2, Appendices 1-2)

Police data from the UCR are broken down by the types of drugs, including heroin, cocaine, cannabis, and miscellaneous drugs. Data are also broken down by nature of offence, including possession, trafficking, importation, and cultivation.

In terms of types of drugs, number of adults charged in Alberta with cannabis offences accounted for 65% of all drug offences in 1998, followed by cocaine (25%), and miscellaneous narcotics (9%). The remaining 1% was for heroin.

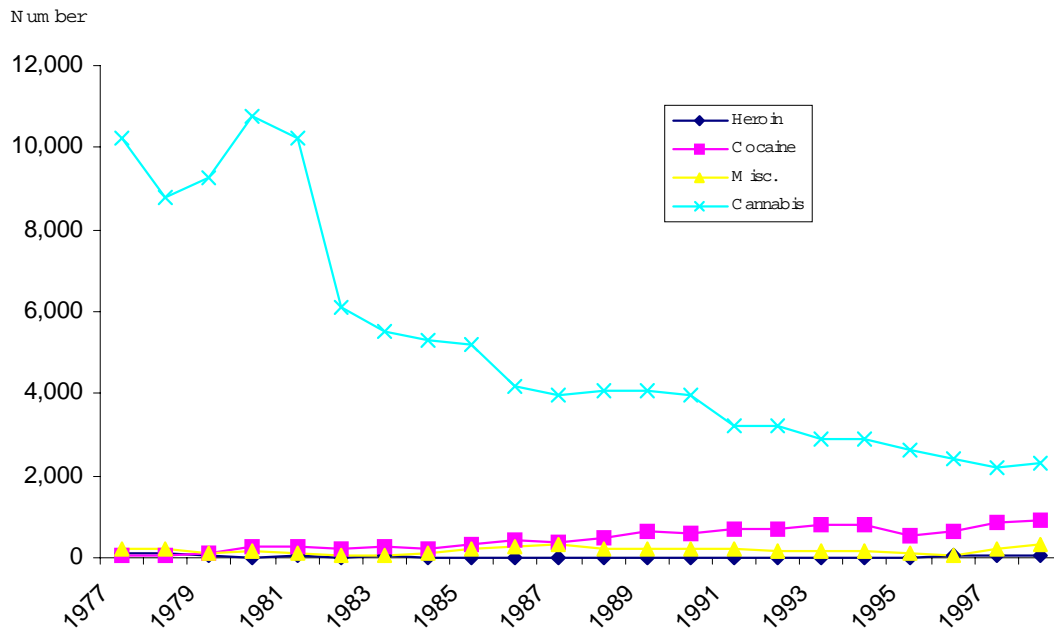
Heroin offences decreased from 111 adults charged in the late 1970s to 30 in 1998. The total number of adults charged was under 100 adults from 1978 on.

Cocaine offences increased rapidly from 59 adults charged in the late 1970s to 813 adults charged in 1993, after which it decreased slightly for a few years. However, it attained its peak in 1998, where 886 adults were charged with a cocaine offence.

Cannabis offences have remained fairly stable from the end of the 1970s to early 1980s (around 10,000 adults charged). In 1982, the number of adults charged with a cannabis offence experienced an important decrease (-40% compared to 1981) and has been on a downward trend ever since (from 6,103 adults charged in 1982 to 2,277 adults charged in 1998).

Miscellaneous drug offences stayed at below 300 adults charged between 1977 and 1986. It increased 31% in 1987, only to decrease until 1997 (from 338 in 1987 to 196 in 1997). Within the last year, miscellaneous drug offences increased to 311 adults charged (+59%).

Figure 1
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by drug type
Alberta, 1977-1998



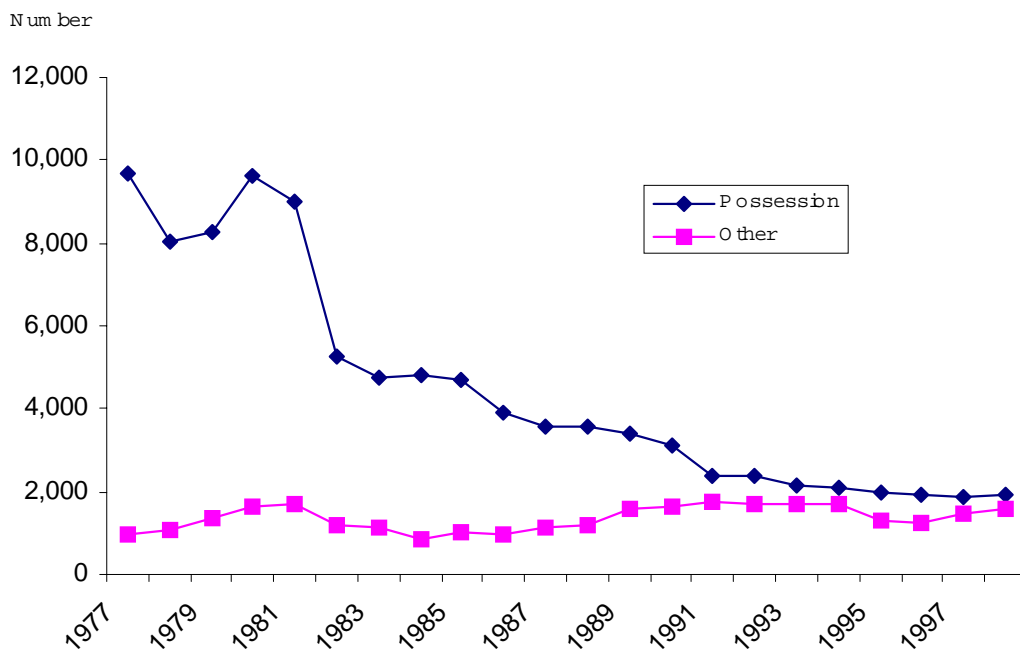
Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

In terms of nature of offence, drug **possession** accounted more than one-half (54%) of all adults charged with drug offences in 1998; drug **trafficking** accounted for 41%; cultivation of cannabis accounted for 5%. There were only 8 drug importation offences reported in 1998

The number of adults charged with drug **possession** has levelled off in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but has decreased 42% from 1981 to 1982. From then on, it slowly decreased, from 5,242 adults charged in 1982 to 1,900 in 1998 (-64%).

In contrast, the number of adults charged with **trafficking** has increased 62% over the 20 years period examined, from 890 adults charged in 1977 to 1,438 in 1998. Importation of drugs has remained under the 20 adults charged from 1977 to 1990, increased to 36 in 1991, only to decrease to 8 adults charged in 1998 (-78%). The number of adults charged with a cultivation offence has remained fairly stable from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. From 1990 to 1998 however, it rapidly increased from 83 adults charged with a cultivation offence in 1990 to 158 in 1998 (+90%).

Figure 2
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type
Alberta, 1977-1998



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

As a whole, the **total** number of adults charged with drug offences in Alberta decreased from 10,619 in the late 1970s to 3,504 in 1998. The trend has generally been levelling in the last few years.

It should be noted that the trend of reported drug offences may or may not reflect the level of usage of drugs as the level depends largely on the level of enforcement by the police.

Comparison between Police Data and Courts Data

The assumption in comparing the number of adults charged by the police and the number of cases handled by provincial criminal courts is that a small proportion of the offenders charged may not actually appear before the courts for various reasons such as diversion. If this is the case, then the number of drug cases in courts should be slightly below the number of adults charged.

Two years of provincial criminal court data were used in the comparison (1996/97 and 1997/98). In 1996/97, there were 3,175 persons charged by the police in Alberta while there were 3,261 cases handled by Alberta provincial criminal courts. The ratio between the two numbers was 1.03, compared to 1.01 for Canada as a whole. Note that the number can be higher than 1 because the time of appearance before the courts is not the same as the time of charging by the police and some cases handled by the courts may have been cases charged by the police in previous year.

However, the situation in 1997/98 was similar. There were 3,349 persons charged by the police in Alberta while there were 3,303 cases handled by Alberta provincial criminal courts. The ratio was 0.99, meaning that for every 100 adults charged by the police, 99 cases were handled in the provincial criminal courts. The situation was quite different for the rest of Canada where the ratio was only 0.68. The reason of these lower ratios is not known.

The conclusion is that for every 100 adults charged by the police in Alberta the average number of court cases is about 100, which is different from the Canada ratio (85). However, the actual number may vary widely from about 40 to 100, depending on the jurisdiction in question.

Methods of Projection

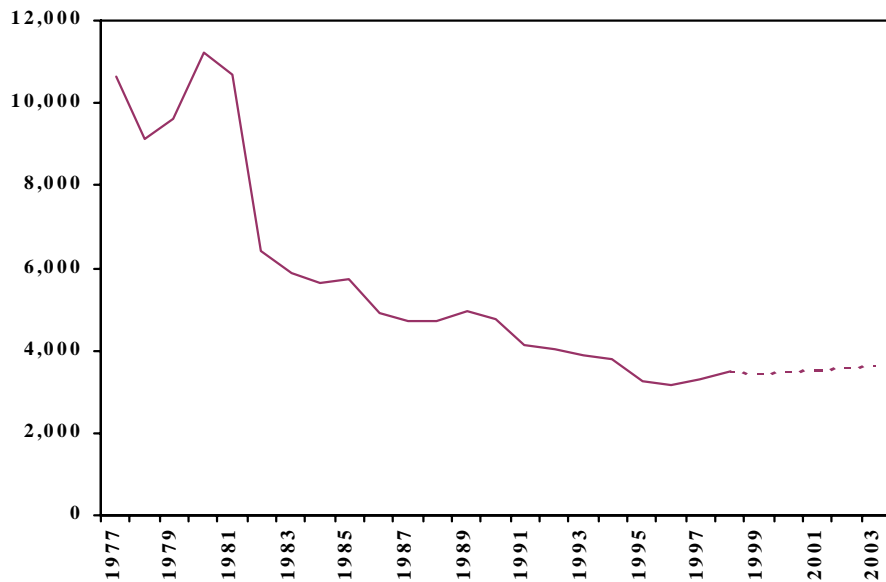
The statistical method chosen in the following projection is called **Holt's two parameter exponential smoothing extrapolation projection**. The method is to define the ongoing trend of drug offences for those years where we have actual data, that is, from 1977 to 1998, and to project the trend into the future for 1999 to 2003. The method involves the calculation of moving averages of historical data. While this method uses all data points in the past, it puts most weight on the most recent preceding years. Therefore, what has been occurring in drug offences for the past several years (for example, 1994 to 1998) will weigh heavily on the outcome of the projected trend for the future.

Results of the Projection (Figure 3, Appendix 3)

While the analysis of historical data includes separate profiles based on types of drugs and nature of offence, the projection is only done for overall total number only because small numbers after the breakdown in many of the jurisdictions.

The result of the extrapolation projection shows that the number of adults charged by the police in Alberta will increase slightly in the next five years, by about 1% per year. The total increase after 5 years is estimated to be about 4%, from 3,504 adults charged in 1998 to 3,658 in 2003.

Figure 3
Number of adults charged with drug offences
Alberta, Actual (1977-1998) and Projected (1999-2003)



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

APPENDICES

Table 1
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by drug type
Alberta, 1977-1998

Year	Heroin	Cocaine	Misc.	Cannabis	Total
1977	111	59	234	10,215	10,619
1978	81	42	232	8,780	9,135
1979	71	126	127	9,276	9,600
1980	26	281	150	10,759	11,216
1981	47	264	107	10,257	10,675
1982	19	209	79	6,103	6,410
1983	27	242	65	5,534	5,868
1984	17	239	88	5,313	5,657
1985	9	311	209	5,192	5,721
1986	12	431	259	4,181	4,883
1987	6	386	338	3,991	4,721
1988	14	456	213	4,051	4,734
1989	25	665	215	4,072	4,977
1990	5	583	203	3,957	4,748
1991	15	696	198	3,219	4,128
1992	3	674	170	3,203	4,050
1993	10	813	145	2,898	3,866
1994	7	797	139	2,870	3,813
1995	13	553	92	2,601	3,259
1996	28	628	78	2,400	3,134
1997	41	844	196	2,216	3,297
1998	30	886	311	2,277	3,504

Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

Table 2
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type
Alberta, 1977-1998

Year	Possession	Trafficking	Importation	Cultivation	Total
1977	9,669	890	13	47	10,619
1978	8,049	1,028	17	41	9,135
1979	8,262	1,309	9	20	9,600
1980	9,602	1,577	14	23	11,216
1981	8,989	1,645	16	25	10,675
1982	5,242	1,143	12	13	6,410
1983	4,727	1,106	9	26	5,868
1984	4,806	828	10	13	5,657
1985	4,706	993	4	18	5,721
1986	3,918	940	3	22	4,883
1987	3,592	1,096	3	30	4,721
1988	3,565	1,093	17	59	4,734
1989	3,388	1,525	7	57	4,977
1990	3,117	1,512	36	83	4,748
1991	2,386	1,607	7	128	4,128
1992	2,375	1,557	5	113	4,050
1993	2,141	1,560	2	163	3,866
1994	2,121	1,530	2	160	3,813
1995	1,960	1,182	5	112	3,259
1996	1,909	1,125	5	95	3,134
1997	1,846	1,327	11	113	3,297
1998	1,900	1,438	8	158	3,504

Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

Table 3
Projected number of adults charged with drug offences
Alberta, 1999-2003

Year	Projected Number
1999	3,448
2000	3,500
2001	3,553
2002	3,605
2003	3,658

Projections prepared by Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice Canada.