

Profile and Projection of Drug Prosecutions
Jurisdiction Report
ONTARIO

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

Research and Statistics Division
Department of Justice Canada

March 2000



Highlights for Ontario

- In 1998, there were 14,354 adults charged by the police with a drug offence, accounting for 37.6% of Canada, same as its population share of 37.7%.
- From 1977 to 1998, the **number of adults charged** with a drug offence decreased by 30% from 20,388 adults charged in 1977 to 14,354 adults charged in 1998. However, the trend has been levelling in the last few years.
- In terms of **types of drugs**, there had been an increase in the number of adults charged with cannabis offences in the late 1970s, followed by a rapid decline and a levelling trend. In contrast, there had been a large increase in the number of adults charged with cocaine offences during the mid-1980s. An increase has also been reported in the number of adults charged with miscellaneous drug offences in the early 1990s. However, heroin offences recorded an increase over the past 20 years, reaching its peak in 1993.
- In terms of **nature of offence**, drug possession now accounts for 69% of all adults charged with drug offences. The remaining 31% 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 **Ontario provincial criminal courts** reveals that for every 100 adults charged, about 83 cases end up in courts.
- Based on the **extrapolation method of projection** selected, the number of adults charged with drug offences will increase about 2% in the next five years, increasing from 14,354 in 1998 to 14,583 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 also 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 Ontario with cannabis offences accounted for 70% of all drug offences in 1998, followed by cocaine (23%), and heroin (2%). The remaining 5% were for miscellaneous narcotics.

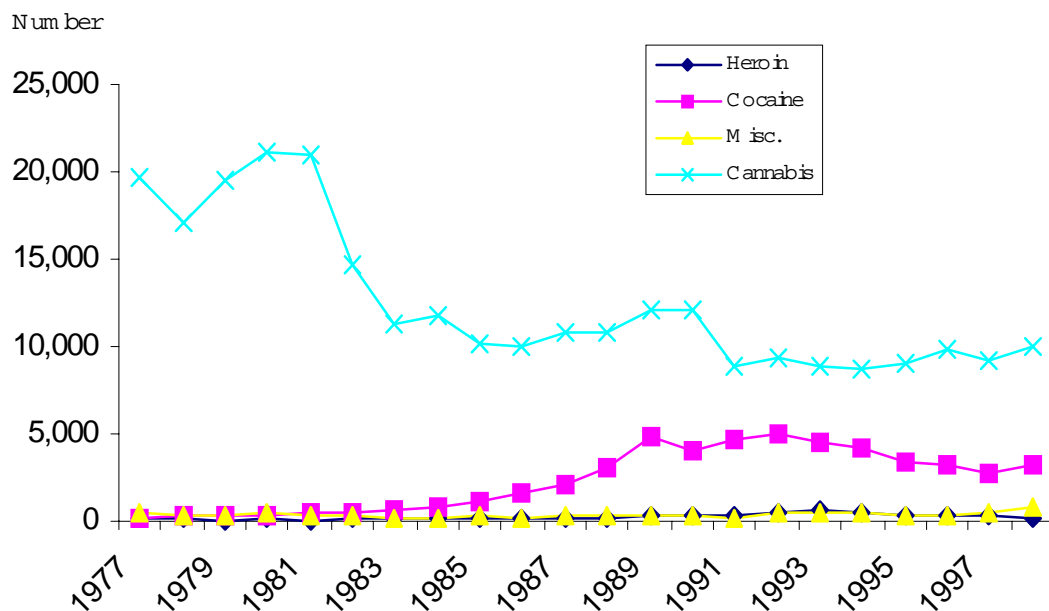
Heroin offences increased from 124 adults charged in the late 1970s to around 583 in 1993. The total number of adults charged slowly declined in the 1990s to 225 adults charged in 1998.

Cocaine offences increased rapidly from 198 adults charged in the late 1970s to its peak of 4,976 adults charged in 1992. From then on, the number of adults charged with a cocaine offence has decreased by 34%, to 3,304 adults charged in 1998.

Cannabis offences have experienced an increase in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s, the level dropped rapidly for two years, followed by a period of levelling trend. The lowest number of adults charged (8,717) was recorded in 1994. Since then, it increased to 10,019 in 1998 (+15%).

Miscellaneous drug offences stayed at below 500 adults charged between 1977 and 1991. The total number has been levelling ever since, except in 1998, where 806 adults were charged.

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



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

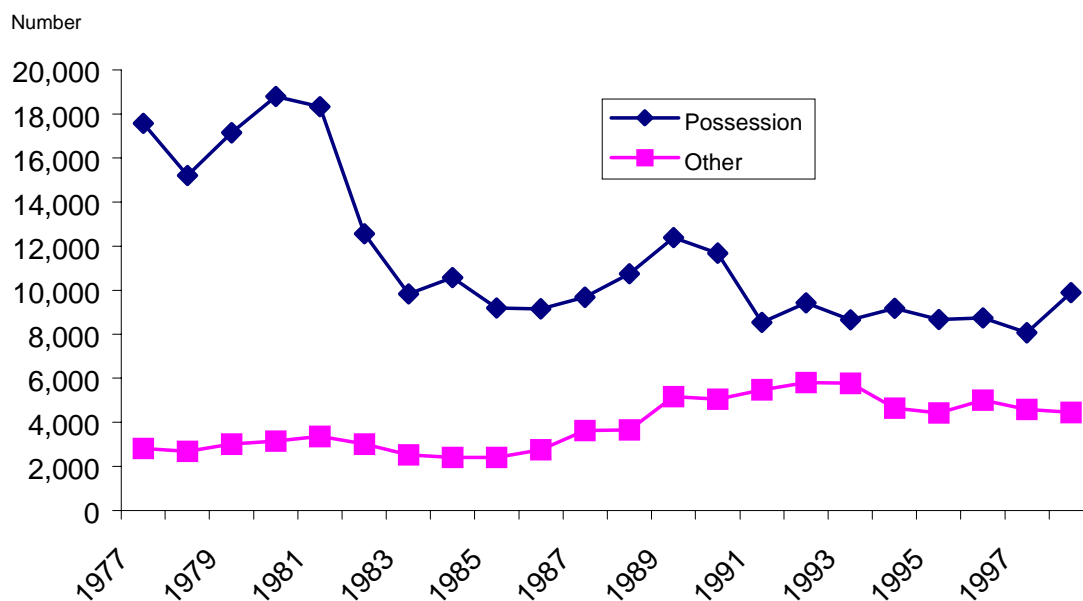
In terms of nature of offence, drug **possession** accounted for two-thirds (69%) of all adults charged with drug offences in 1998; drug **trafficking** accounted for 23%; cultivation of cannabis accounted for 5%; drug importation accounted for the remaining 3%.

The number of adults charged with drug **possession** slightly increased between 1977 to 1981, from about 17,566 in 1977 to 18,327 in 1981. Since then, the number of adults charged

decreased gradually and by 1998, the total was 9,895. Drug possession accounted for 86% of all drug offences in 1977 but only 69% in 1998.

In contrast, the number of adults charged with **trafficking** and importation of drugs increased rapidly from 2,748 in 1977 to 5,361 in 1992. Since then, the trend has been on a steady decrease. 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 137 adults charged with a cultivation offence in 1990 to 757 in 1998 (almost 5 times higher).

Figure 2
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type
Ontario, 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 Ontario decreased from 20,388 in the late 1970s to 14,354 in the last few years. The trend has generally been increasing 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 13,485 persons charged by the police in Ontario while there were 14,186 cases handled by Ontario provincial criminal courts. The ratio between the two numbers was 1.05, 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 quite different. There were 13,078 persons charged by the police in Ontario while there were 8,046 cases handled by Ontario provincial criminal courts. The ratio was 0.62, meaning that for every 100 adults charged by the police, 62 cases were handled in the provincial criminal courts. This was significantly lower than in 1996/97. The situation was similar 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 Ontario the average number of court cases is about 83, which is similar to 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

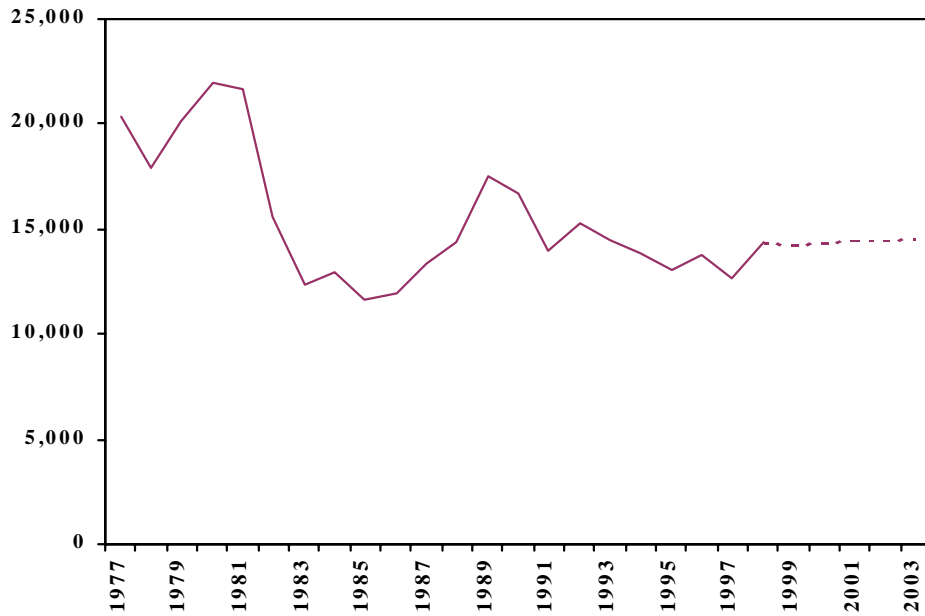
The statistical method chosen in the following projection is called **Holt's two parameter exponential smoothing extrapolation projection**. The method is to define the ongoing trend of drug offences for those years where we have actual data, that is, from 1977 to 1998, and to project the trend into 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 Ontario will increase slightly in the next five years. The total increase after 5 years is estimated to be about 2%, from 14,354 adults charged in 1998 to 14,583 in 2003.

Figure 3
Number of adults charged with drug offences
Ontario, 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
Ontario, 1977-1998

Year	Heroin	Cocaine	Misc.	Cannabis	Total
1977	124	198	461	19,605	20,388
1978	114	269	400	17,105	17,888
1979	73	283	349	19,450	20,155
1980	98	316	443	21,088	21,945
1981	52	426	328	20,890	21,696
1982	94	446	315	14,726	15,581
1983	186	607	219	11,353	12,365
1984	94	832	221	11,834	12,981
1985	129	1,059	284	10,139	11,611
1986	182	1,538	241	9,953	11,914
1987	162	2,053	299	10,807	13,321
1988	202	3,079	279	10,846	14,406
1989	261	4,778	331	12,177	17,547
1990	312	4,015	373	12,047	16,747
1991	318	4,617	203	8,864	14,002
1992	406	4,976	506	9,356	15,244
1993	583	4,481	444	8,923	14,431
1994	415	4,250	439	8,717	13,821
1995	267	3,402	327	9,109	13,105
1996	244	3,291	394	9,833	13,762
1997	269	2,710	418	9,256	12,653
1998	225	3,304	806	10,019	14,354

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

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

Year	Possession	Trafficking	Importation	Cultivation	Total
1977	17,566	2,673	75	74	20,388
1978	15,206	2,498	103	81	17,888
1979	17,144	2,830	131	50	20,155
1980	18,799	2,996	84	66	21,945
1981	18,327	3,278	55	36	21,696
1982	12,564	2,882	81	54	15,581
1983	9,831	2,449	35	50	12,365
1984	10,579	2,316	46	40	12,981
1985	9,193	2,352	42	24	11,611
1986	9,162	2,586	134	32	11,914
1987	9,683	3,452	126	60	13,321
1988	10,746	3,459	121	80	14,406
1989	12,382	4,871	157	137	17,547
1990	11,689	4,685	198	175	16,747
1991	8,524	4,975	259	244	14,002
1992	9,426	4,927	434	457	15,244
1993	8,656	4,782	534	459	14,431
1994	9,171	3,841	400	409	13,821
1995	8,666	3,483	423	533	13,105
1996	8,747	3,884	520	611	13,762
1997	8,060	3,464	422	707	12,653
1998	9,895	3,341	361	757	14,354

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

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

Year	Projected Number
1999	14,318
2000	14,385
2001	14,451
2002	14,517
2003	14,583

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