

Profile and Projection of Drug Prosecutions
Jurisdiction Report
ATLANTIC PROVINCES
(including Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island,
Nova Scotia and New Brunswick)

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

Research and Statistics Division
Department of Justice Canada

March 2000



Highlights for Atlantic provinces

- In 1998, there were 4,248 adults charged by the police with a drug offence, accounting for 6.2% of Canada, which is higher than its population share of 7.8%.
- From 1977 to 1998, the **number of adults charged** with a drug offence decreased by 44% from 4,248 adults charged in 1977 to 2,378 adults charged in 1998. However, the trend has been stable in the last few years.
- In terms of **types of drugs**, there had been a large increase in the number of adults charged with a cannabis offence in the early 1980s. Since 1982, however, it has been on a slow downward trend. In contrast, there had been a large increase in the number of adults charged with cocaine offences since the late 1980s. The number of adults charged with miscellaneous drug offences has been on a downward trend before 1995 but has since increased rapidly. However, heroin offences recorded a decrease in the period examined.
- In terms of **nature of offence**, drug possession now accounts for 64% of all adults charged with drug offence while drug trafficking accounts for 28%. The remaining 8% involve cultivation and importation of drugs. The proportion of drug possession has slowly increased in the last few years while drug trafficking have remained fairly stable.
- A comparison between the number of adults charged with drug offences and the number of drug cases handled in **the Atlantic provinces provincial criminal courts** (excluding New Brunswick) reveals that for every 100 adults charged, about 75 cases end up in courts.
- Based on the **extrapolation method of projection** selected, the number of adults charged with drug offences will increase about 12% in the next five years, increasing from 2,378 in 1998 to 2,652 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 the Atlantic provinces with cannabis offences accounted for 78% of all drug offences in 1998, followed by cocaine (12%), and miscellaneous narcotics (10%). Only 1 adult was charged with a heroin offence that year.

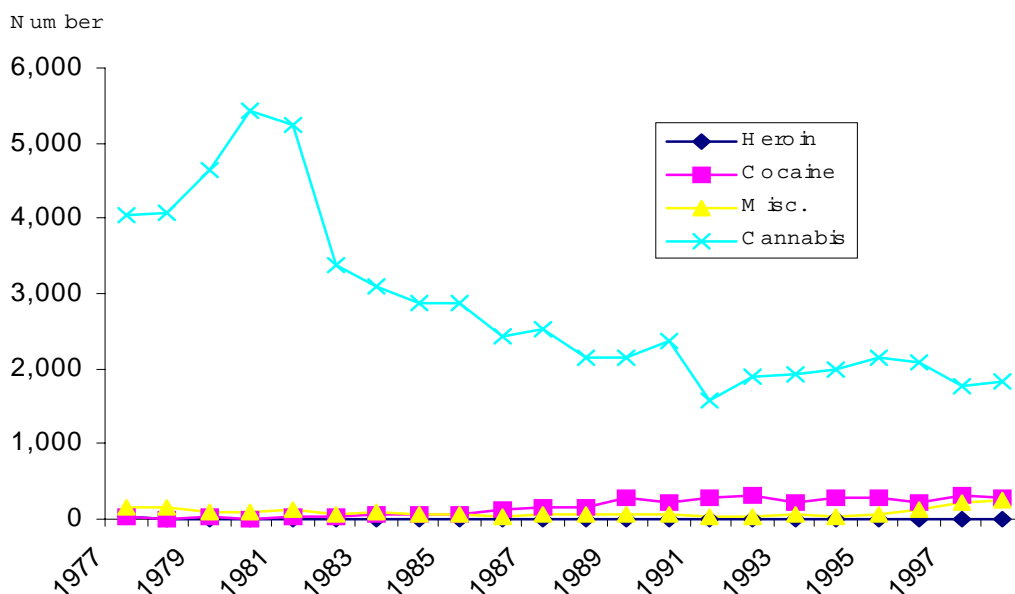
Heroin offences have decreased dramatically from 17 adults charged in 1977 to 1 adult charged in 1998. Because of the small numbers, there were wide fluctuations.

Cocaine offences increased dramatically from 21 adults charged in the late 1970s to 285 in 1998 (14 times). The biggest increase was reported between 1985 to 1986 (+118%).

Cannabis offences increased rapidly in the early 1980s. From 1982 on, the number of adults charged with a cannabis offence was on a slow downward trend, and has decreased 65% from from 5,252 in 1981 to 1,847 in 1998.

Miscellaneous drug offences have decreased steadily from 153 adults charged in 1977 to 48 adults charged in 1995. However, there were large increases in the past few years. The 1998 total of 245 adults was 4 times the number in 1995 (48 adults).

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



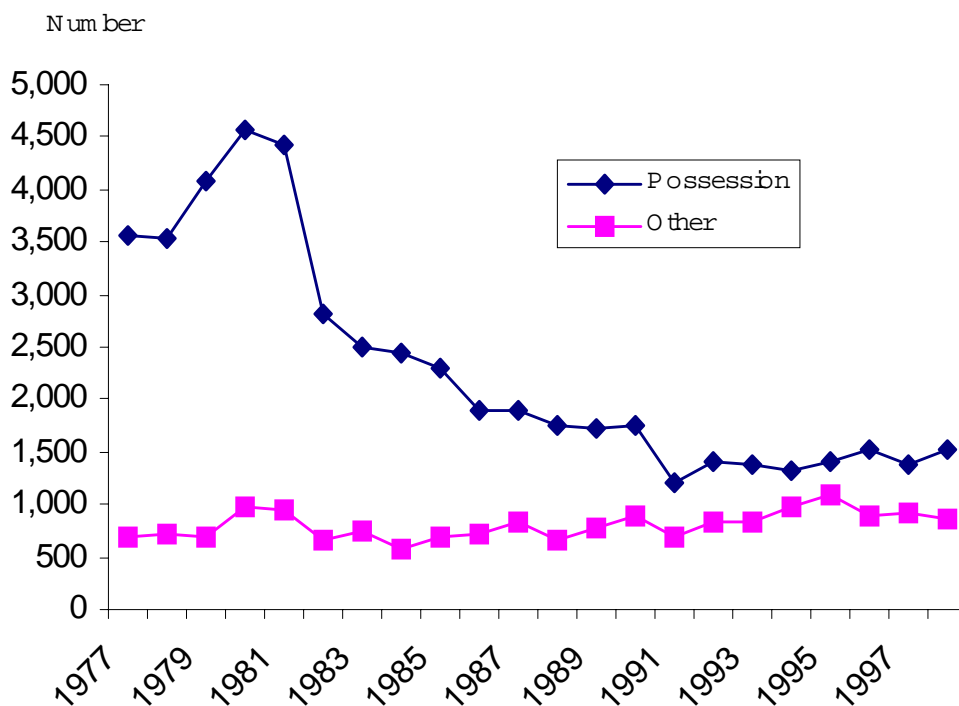
Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

In terms of nature of offence, drug **possession** accounted for two-thirds (64%) of all adults charged with drug offences in 1998; drug **trafficking** accounted for 28%; cultivation of cannabis accounted for 7%. Drug importation offences accounted for less than 1% of the drug offences reported in 1998

The number of adults charged with drug **possession** increased in the early 1980s. In 1982, it started its downward trend from 2,816 adults charged with a possession offence to 1,511 adults charged in 1998 (-46%).

The number of adults charged with **trafficking** has remained fairly stable through the years, where less than 1,000 adults charged, except in 1995 where 1,026 adults were charged with a trafficking offence. Importation of drugs has remained under 30 adults charged for the period examined, and the decrease from 1977 (23) to 1998 (19) has been minimal. The number of adults charged with a cultivation offence has remained fairly stable from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. However, there has been a rapid increase in the 1990s, from 22 in 1991 to 171 adults charged in 1998, an eightfold increase.

Figure 2
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type
Atlantic provinces, 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 Atlantic provinces decreased from 4,248 in the late 1970s to 2,378 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

This section only examines data from Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, as New Brunswick does not report to the Adult Criminal Court Survey (ACCS).

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 1,644 persons charged by the police in the Atlantic provinces while there were 1,393 cases handled by Atlantic provinces provincial criminal courts. The ratio between the two numbers was 0.85, 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 ratio in 1997/98 was significantly lower. There were 1,535 persons charged by the police in the Atlantic provinces while there were 870 cases handled by Atlantic provinces provincial criminal courts. The ratio was 0.57, meaning that for every 100 adults charged by the police, 57 cases were handled in the provincial criminal courts. 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 Atlantic provinces the average number of court cases is about 75, which is slightly lower than 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

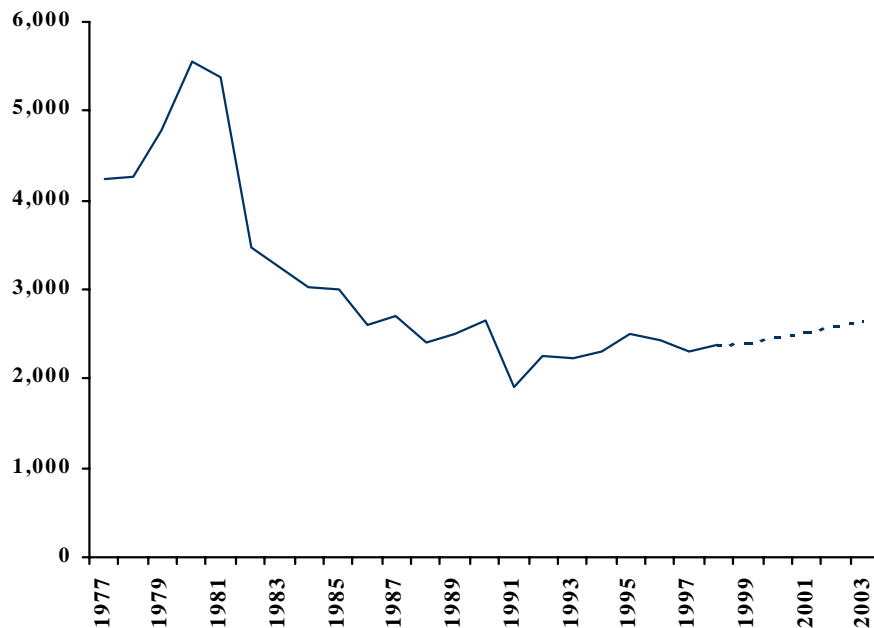
The statistical method chosen in the following projection is called **Holt's two parameter exponential smoothing extrapolation projection**. The method is to define the ongoing trend of drug offences for those years where we have actual data, that is, from 1977 to 1998, and to project the trend into 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 the Atlantic provinces will increase slightly in the next five years. The total increase after 5 years is estimated to be about 12%, from 2,378 adults charged in 1998 to 2,652 in 2003.

Figure 3
Number of adults charged with drug offences
Atlantic Provinces, 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
Atlantic provinces, 1977-1998

Year	Heroin	Cocaine	Misc.	Cannabis	Total
1977	17	21	153	4,057	4,248
1978	5	8	156	4,087	4,256
1979	7	21	109	4,648	4,785
1980	4	3	108	5,435	5,550
1981	2	21	112	5,252	5,387
1982	2	21	53	3,393	3,469
1983	1	57	93	3,107	3,258
1984	12	63	76	2,869	3,020
1985	9	57	56	2,875	2,997
1986	0	124	43	2,433	2,600
1987	4	145	51	2,511	2,711
1988	2	167	70	2,161	2,400
1989	8	285	67	2,149	2,509
1990	2	220	56	2,374	2,652
1991	3	274	43	1,593	1,913
1992	3	331	27	1,885	2,246
1993	3	223	55	1,940	2,221
1994	5	285	42	1,983	2,315
1995	15	291	48	2,159	2,513
1996	1	223	114	2,100	2,438
1997	1	311	206	1,781	2,299
1998	1	285	245	1,847	2,378

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

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

Year	Possession	Trafficking	Importation	Cultivation	Total
1977	3,560	655	23	10	4,248
1978	3,544	684	7	21	4,256
1979	4,088	688	7	2	4,785
1980	4,560	960	24	6	5,550
1981	4,425	940	11	11	5,387
1982	2,816	636	8	9	3,469
1983	2,508	725	9	16	3,258
1984	2,434	564	8	14	3,020
1985	2,297	660	25	15	2,997
1986	1,892	670	24	14	2,600
1987	1,892	781	28	10	2,711
1988	1,744	638	6	12	2,400
1989	1,728	749	10	22	2,509
1990	1,754	875	6	17	2,652
1991	1,215	670	6	22	1,913
1992	1,403	789	3	51	2,246
1993	1,385	795	3	38	2,221
1994	1,336	916	15	48	2,315
1995	1,410	1,026	4	73	2,513
1996	1,533	789	6	110	2,438
1997	1,371	729	21	178	2,299
1998	1,511	677	19	171	2,378

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

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

Year	Projected Number
1999	2,417
2000	2,476
2001	2,536
2002	2,593
2003	2,652

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