

Profile and Projection of Drug Prosecutions
Jurisdiction Report
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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

Research and Statistics Division
Department of Justice Canada

March 2000



Highlights for British Columbia

- In 1998, there were 7,069 adults charged by the police with a drug offence, accounting for 18.5% of Canada, which is higher than its population share of 13.2%.
- From 1977 to 1998, the **number of adults charged** with a drug offence decreased by 15% from 8,281 adults charged in 1977 to 7,069 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 decrease in the number of adults charged with a cannabis offence in the late 1970s. Since 1981, after a short increase, it has been on a 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 an upward trend until 1992, and decreased dramatically since that year. However, heroin offences recorded a decrease in the early 1980s to attain its lowest level in 1987 but have since increased up until 1998.
- In terms of **nature of offence**, drug trafficking now accounts for 47% of all adults charged with drug offence while drug possession accounts for 35%. The remaining 18% involve cultivation and importation of drugs. The proportion of drug trafficking has slowly increased in the last few years while drug possession have slowly decreased.
- 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 7,069 in 1998 to 7,373 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 British Columbia with cannabis offences accounted for 48% of all drug offences in 1998, followed by cocaine (39%), and heroin (10%). The remaining 3% were for miscellaneous narcotics.

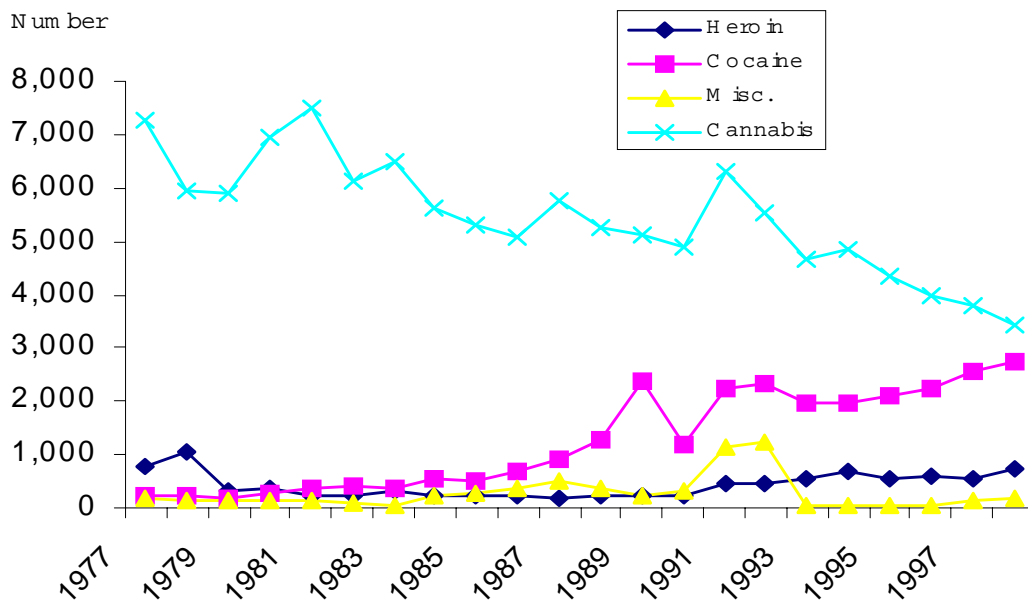
Heroin offences in 1977 were similar to 1998. It decreased from 761 adults charged in the late 1970s to around 200 in mid-1980s but has increased to 736 in 1998. The total number of adults charged was under 750 adults since 1979.

Cocaine offences increased dramatically from 205 adults charged in the late 1970s to 2,741 in 1998 (13 times higher). The biggest increases were reported between 1988 to 1989 (+85%), and once again between 1990 and 1991 (+93%).

Cannabis offences have remained fairly stable from the end of the 1970s to early 1980s. From 1982 on, the number of adults charged with a cannabis offence decreased 54% from the number of adults charged in 1981 (from 7,398 in 1981 to 3,408 in 1998).

Miscellaneous drug offences have remained fairly stable in the late 1970s to 1980s. From the mid-1980s, it started an upward trend to attain its highest of 1,231 in 1992. In the past six years, it decreased 85% to 184 adults charged in 1998.

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



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

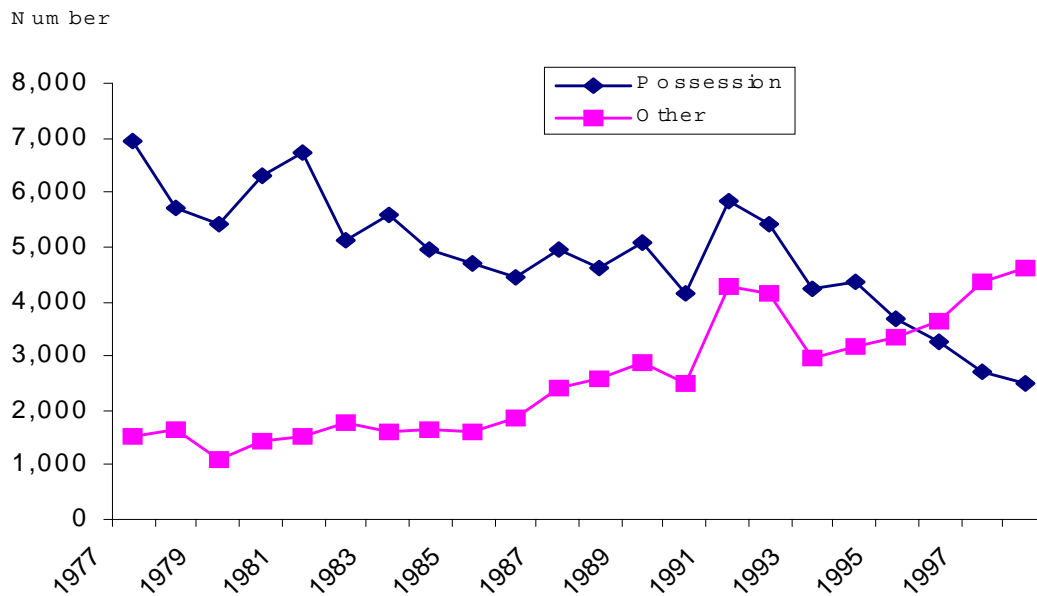
In terms of nature of offence, drug **trafficking** accounted almost one-half (47%) of all adults charged with drug offences in 1998; drug **possession** accounted for 35%; cultivation of cannabis accounted for 17%. Drug **importation** offences accounted for less than 1% of drug offences reported in 1998.

The number of adults charged with drug **possession** has levelled off in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but has decreased 26% from 1983 to 1990 (5,483 in 1983 to 4,058 in 1990). A 42%

increase was reported in 1991 (5,777 adults charged that year), only to decrease every year until 1998 (-57%).

In contrast, the number of adults charged with **trafficking** has increased 143% over the 20 years period, from 1,380 adults charged in 1977 to 3,354 in 1998. Importation of drugs has remained under the 55 adults charged from 1979 to 1998. The number of adults charged with a cultivation offence has remained fairly stable from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. From 1983 to 1998 however, it rapidly increased from 118 adults charged with a cultivation offence to 1,204 (10 times higher).

Figure 2
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type
British Columbia, 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 British Columbia decreased from 8,281 in the late 1970s to 7,069 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

Because British Columbia does not report to the Adult Criminal Court Survey (ACCS), it was therefore impossible to make the comparison between police and courts data for British Columbia.

Methods of Projection

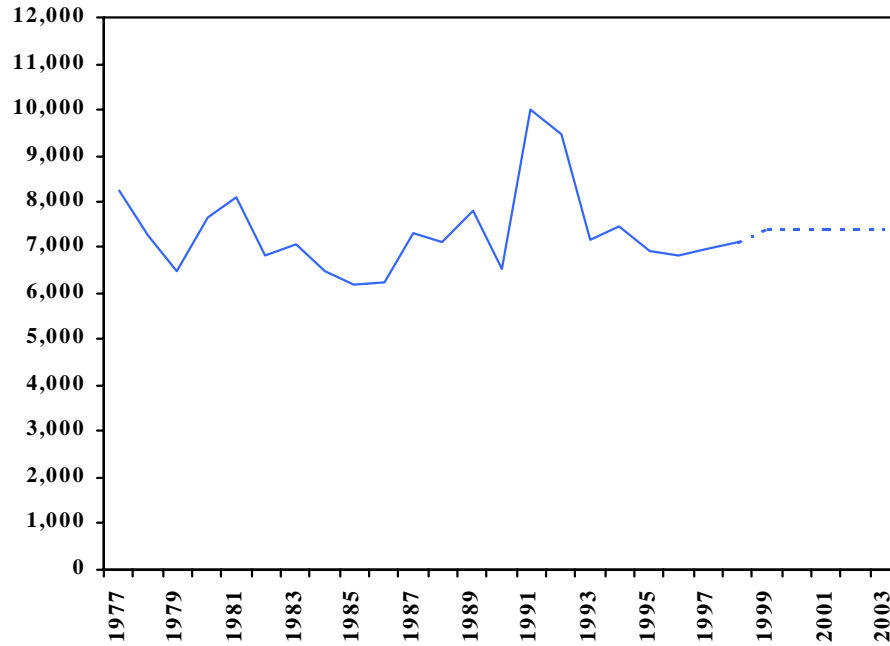
The statistical method chosen in the following projection is called **Holt's two parameter exponential smoothing extrapolation projection**. The method is to define the ongoing trend of drug offences for those years where we have actual data, that is, from 1977 to 1998, and to project the trend into 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 British Columbia will increase slightly in the next five years. The total increase after 5 years is estimated to be about 4%, from 7,069 adults charged in 1998 to 7,373 in 2003.

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

Year	Heroin	Cocaine	Misc.	Cannabis	Total
1977	761	205	189	7,126	8,281
1978	1,063	228	144	5,797	7,232
1979	323	189	127	5,812	6,451
1980	345	290	111	6,884	7,630
1981	220	370	127	7,398	8,115
1982	250	398	94	6,065	6,807
1983	322	340	60	6,328	7,050
1984	207	534	228	5,509	6,478
1985	225	487	295	5,187	6,194
1986	210	669	351	4,996	6,226
1987	189	915	485	5,702	7,291
1988	233	1,284	382	5,182	7,081
1989	206	2,372	226	5,024	7,828
1990	238	1,165	329	4,790	6,522
1991	444	2,245	1,124	6,188	10,001
1992	457	2,341	1,231	5,463	9,492
1993	536	1,954	47	4,585	7,122
1994	673	1,943	46	4,755	7,417
1995	537	2,101	24	4,239	6,901
1996	612	2,223	50	3,920	6,805
1997	550	2,536	128	3,749	6,963
1998	736	2,741	184	3,408	7,069

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

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

Year	Possession	Trafficking	Importation	Cultivation	Total
1977	6,796	1,380	35	70	8,281
1978	5,590	1,481	72	89	7,232
1979	5,343	1,008	40	60	6,451
1980	6,228	1,324	27	51	7,630
1981	6,633	1,414	34	34	8,115
1982	5,057	1,658	25	67	6,807
1983	5,483	1,396	53	118	7,050
1984	4,838	1,457	43	140	6,478
1985	4,603	1,411	43	137	6,194
1986	4,387	1,607	19	213	6,226
1987	4,886	2,074	33	298	7,291
1988	4,550	2,141	25	365	7,081
1989	4,999	2,348	35	446	7,828
1990	4,058	2,090	26	348	6,522
1991	5,777	3,650	34	540	10,001
1992	5,374	3,348	48	722	9,492
1993	4,175	2,378	21	548	7,122
1994	4,287	2,370	19	741	7,417
1995	3,583	2,589	20	709	6,901
1996	3,177	2,815	15	798	6,805
1997	2,661	2,997	44	1,261	6,963
1998	2,472	3,354	39	1,204	7,069

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

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

Year	Projected Number
1999	7,404
2000	7,396
2001	7,389
2002	7,381
2003	7,373

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