

Profile and Projection of Drug Prosecutions
Jurisdiction Report
QUEBEC

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

Research and Statistics Division
Department of Justice Canada

March 2000



Highlights for Quebec

- In 1998, there were 8,122 adults charged by the police with a drug offence, accounting for 21.3% of Canada, same as its population share of 24.2%.
- From 1977 to 1998, the **number of adults charged** with a drug offence increased by 77% from 4,600 adults charged in 1977 to 8,122 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 and 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, heroine offences recorded an increase over the past 20 years, reaching its peak in 1992.
- In terms of **nature of offence**, drug possession now accounts for 47% of all adults charged with drug offences. The remaining 53% 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 **Quebec provincial criminal courts** reveals that for every 100 adults charged, about 95 cases end up in courts.
- Based on the **extrapolation method of projection** selected, the number of adults charged with drug offences will increase 12% in the next five years, increasing from 8,122 in 1998 to 9,118 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 Quebec with cannabis offences accounted for 60% of all drug offences in 1998, followed by cocaine (27%), and heroine (1%). The remaining 12% were for miscellaneous narcotics.

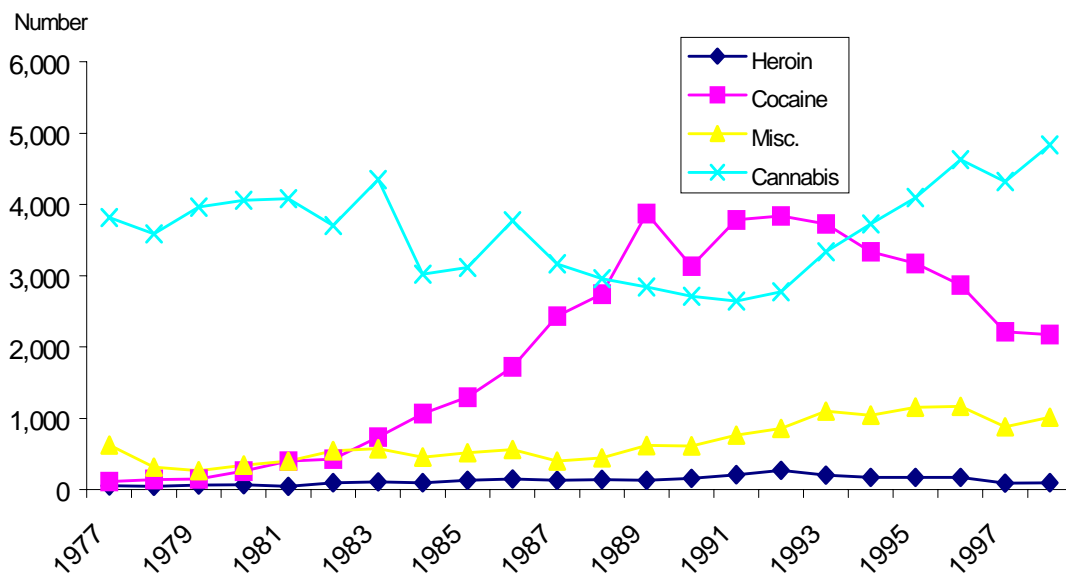
Heroin offences increased from 51 adults charged in the late 1970s to around 269 in 1992. The total number of adults charged slowly declined in the 1990s to 97 adults charged in 1998.

Cocaine offences increased rapidly from 112 adults charged in the late 1970s to its peak of 3,870 adults charged in 1989. From then on, the number of adults charged with a cocaine offence has decreased 43%, to 2,175 adults charged in 1998.

Cannabis offences have varied over the 1970s to most of the 1980s. It reached its lowest in 1991 at 2,645 adults charged and has been on a steady increase ever since (+83% from 1991 to 1998).

Miscellaneous drug offences stayed at below 1,000 adults charged between 1977 and 1992. The total number has been levelling ever since, except in 1997, where 881 adults were charged.

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



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

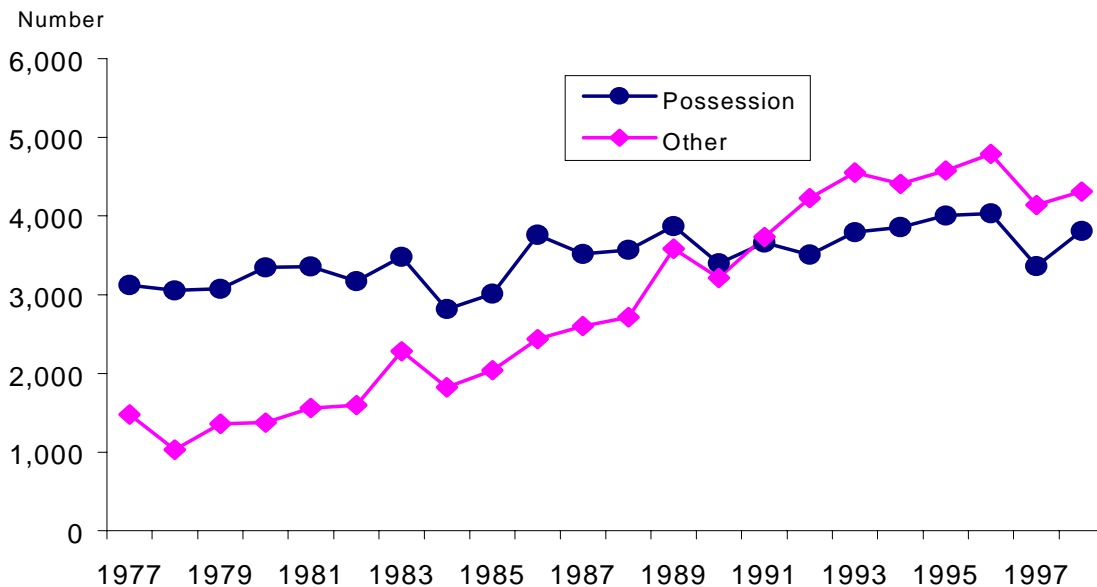
In terms of nature of offence, drug **possession** accounted for almost one-half (47%) of all adults charged with drug offences in 1998; drug **trafficking** accounted for 43%; cultivation of cannabis accounted for 9%; drug importation accounted for the remaining 1%.

The number of adults charged with drug **possession** increased between 1977 to 1986, from about 3,122 in 1977 to 3,759 in 1986. Since then, the increase has slowed down. By 1998, the total

was 3,809. Drug possession accounted for 68% of all drug offences in 1977 but only 47% in 1998.

In contrast, the number of adults charged with **trafficking** and importation of drugs increased rapidly from 1,318 in 1977 to 4,223 in 1996. Since then, the trend has been levelling off. The number of adults charged with a cultivation offence has remained fairly stable from the late 1970s to the early 1980s only to decrease to a low of 25 adults charged in 1986. However, it rapidly increased from then on, from 144 adults charged with a cultivation offence in 1992 to 736 in 1998.

Figure 2
Number of adults charged with drug offences, by offence type
Quebec, 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 Quebec increased from 4,600 in 1977 to over 8,122 in 1998. The trend has generally been decreasing 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 8,495 persons charged by the police in Quebec while there were 9,211 cases handled by Quebec provincial criminal courts. The ratio between the two numbers was 1.08, 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 7,661 persons charged by the police in Quebec while there were 6,199 cases handled by Quebec provincial criminal courts. The ratio was 0.81, meaning that for every 100 adults charged by the police, 81 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 Quebec the average number of court cases is about 95, compared to 85 in Canada. However, the actual number may vary widely from about 40 to 100, depending on the jurisdiction in question.

Methods of Projection

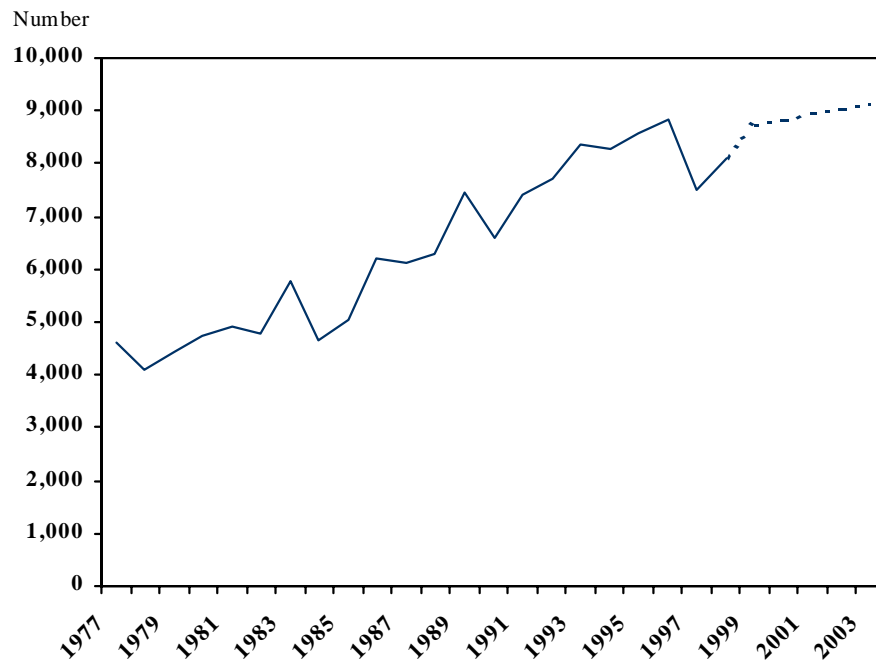
The statistical method chosen in the following projection is called **Holt's two parameter exponential smoothing extrapolation projection**. The method is to define the ongoing trend of drug offences for those years where we have actual data, that is, from 1977 to 1998, and to project the trend into 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 of 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 Quebec will increase in the next five years. The total increase after 5 years is estimated to be about 12%, from 8,122 adults charged in 1998 to 9,118 in 2003.

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

| Year | Heroin | Cocaine | Misc. | Cannabis | Total |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1977 | 51 | 112 | 624 | 3,813 | 4,600 |
| 1978 | 43 | 141 | 314 | 3,587 | 4,085 |
| 1979 | 62 | 148 | 263 | 3,963 | 4,436 |
| 1980 | 65 | 258 | 343 | 4,056 | 4,722 |
| 1981 | 43 | 399 | 396 | 4,080 | 4,918 |
| 1982 | 96 | 424 | 544 | 3,705 | 4,769 |
| 1983 | 107 | 732 | 574 | 4,348 | 5,761 |
| 1984 | 97 | 1,067 | 453 | 3,022 | 4,639 |
| 1985 | 129 | 1,296 | 514 | 3,114 | 5,053 |
| 1986 | 146 | 1,718 | 562 | 3,768 | 6,194 |
| 1987 | 128 | 2,429 | 398 | 3,164 | 6,119 |
| 1988 | 138 | 2,740 | 445 | 2,957 | 6,280 |
| 1989 | 128 | 3,870 | 617 | 2,840 | 7,455 |
| 1990 | 158 | 3,134 | 609 | 2,713 | 6,614 |
| 1991 | 210 | 3,779 | 763 | 2,645 | 7,397 |
| 1992 | 269 | 3,835 | 856 | 2,775 | 7,735 |
| 1993 | 200 | 3,723 | 1,096 | 3,331 | 8,350 |
| 1994 | 169 | 3,332 | 1,041 | 3,723 | 8,265 |
| 1995 | 170 | 3,170 | 1,155 | 4,093 | 8,588 |
| 1996 | 167 | 2,866 | 1,164 | 4,627 | 8,824 |
| 1997 | 91 | 2,213 | 881 | 4,322 | 7,507 |
| 1998 | 97 | 2,175 | 1,015 | 4,835 | 8,122 |

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

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

| Year | Possession | Trafficking | Importation | Cultivation | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1977 | 3,122 | 1,318 | 68 | 92 | 4,600 |
| 1978 | 3,054 | 853 | 106 | 72 | 4,085 |
| 1979 | 3,075 | 1,163 | 107 | 91 | 4,436 |
| 1980 | 3,349 | 1,212 | 61 | 100 | 4,722 |
| 1981 | 3,359 | 1,409 | 45 | 105 | 4,918 |
| 1982 | 3,174 | 1,425 | 97 | 73 | 4,769 |
| 1983 | 3,480 | 1,881 | 298 | 102 | 5,761 |
| 1984 | 2,816 | 1,460 | 310 | 53 | 4,639 |
| 1985 | 3,011 | 1,739 | 271 | 32 | 5,053 |
| 1986 | 3,759 | 2,242 | 168 | 25 | 6,194 |
| 1987 | 3,519 | 2,319 | 234 | 47 | 6,119 |
| 1988 | 3,568 | 2,532 | 139 | 41 | 6,280 |
| 1989 | 3,873 | 3,357 | 136 | 89 | 7,455 |
| 1990 | 3,398 | 3,114 | 62 | 40 | 6,614 |
| 1991 | 3,663 | 3,516 | 146 | 72 | 7,397 |
| 1992 | 3,507 | 3,910 | 174 | 144 | 7,735 |
| 1993 | 3,797 | 4,221 | 173 | 159 | 8,350 |
| 1994 | 3,857 | 4,097 | 112 | 199 | 8,265 |
| 1995 | 4,007 | 4,147 | 167 | 267 | 8,588 |
| 1996 | 4,032 | 4,223 | 150 | 419 | 8,824 |
| 1997 | 3,364 | 3,441 | 102 | 600 | 7,507 |
| 1998 | 3,809 | 3,479 | 98 | 736 | 8,122 |

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

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

| Year | Projected Number |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1999 | 8,769 |
| 2000 | 8,856 |
| 2001 | 8,944 |
| 2002 | 9,031 |
| 2003 | 9,118 |

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