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Police Drug Sample Submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory and Police Statistics on Drug Offences in British Columbia 2004-2008: A Comparative Analysis of the Decline

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Introduction

Over the last five years, the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory has seen significant changes in the overall number of drug submissions sent to its facility in Burnaby, British Columbia by law enforcement agencies in British Columbia. In effect, the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory saw a decline in the number of submissions from 2004 to 2005, a rise back to 2004 levels in 2006, a further rise in 2007, and then a very substantial drop to below 2004 levels in 2008. The change overall for the five-year 2004 to 2008 period was an 11.9% decrease in the number of submissions in 2008 compared to the number of submissions in 2004.

The purpose of this report is to provide a closer examination of this decline in submissions over this recent five-year period with a view to determining the extent to which the decrease may be related to either a change in police practices with respect to drug offences, or simply a very real decline in drug offending across the province. To this end, the primary analysis upon which the report was formed focused as near as possible on a comparative 2004 to 2008 analysis of submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory relative to drug offences coming to the attention of police agencies in British Columbia over the same time period.

As the report will describe, the decline in submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory was very consistent with what appeared overall to be a very real decrease in drug offending between 2004 and 2008 in British Columbia. Further, the analysis revealed that the decline in submissions would have been even more pronounced had there not been a significant increase in the percentage of cases cleared by charge by police. The general consistency in patterns apparent across provincial districts, drug types, and drug offence types, as shown by the analysis, should lend credence to these two broad conclusions.

Methodology

The analysis for this report was based on two datasets. One of those datasets was provided by the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory and included information about drug submissions by British Columbia police agencies dating back to 1998. The dataset included information about the year of drug sample submission, type of drug involved, and the policing jurisdiction/authority providing the sample. However, only cases from 2004 forward were considered as the researchers did not have timely access to complete police data on drug cases from before 2004. From this 2004 to 2008 dataset, a total of 80,411 cases were available for analysis.

The other dataset which formed the basis for analysis was constructed and provided by the RCMP (E Division, Operations Strategy Branch) and included all drug cases coming to the attention of all law enforcement authorities in British Columbia from 2004 to 2008. As with the Health Canada dataset, the RCMP dataset included information about the year of the drug file, the type of drug, and the policing jurisdiction providing the sample. It also included information about the type of offence involved (i.e. possession, trafficking, production, and importing/exporting), the RCMP Provincial District (i.e. Lower Mainland, Island, North, and Southeast) within which the policing jurisdiction was located, and the nature of the police action associated with the file (i.e. cleared, cleared otherwise, or not cleared). The dataset was constructed by merging police data from the new police PRIME information system and its predecessor, the police OSR/PIRS information system. The merge was necessary given that not all police jurisdictions had switched over to the PRIME system by 2004 (although, by 2008, all police agencies in the province were working under the new system). From the merge, a total of 212,414 cases (including 1,934 Electrical Fire and Safety Initiative (EFSI) cases as discussed below being added later) were available for analysis.

With these two datasets in place, and to facilitate cross-dataset comparisons, the researchers created new variables through a recoding of the Health Canada jurisdiction data by RCMP Provincial Districts and by recoding both the Health Canada and RCMP drug type data from very specific drug types to five individual drug categories. The drug categories included: marijuana (including hashish); cocaine; other Schedule I drugs; Schedule III drugs; and Schedule IV drugs. The recoding of drug type to drug categories was necessary for certain analyses given the small number of cases respecting various additional drug types. The recoding of jurisdiction data to Provincial District was necessary given the small number of cases associated to various individual policing jurisdiction and because some Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory submissions were from police units that operated regionally. Accordingly, the specific jurisdiction could not be confirmed in a small number of cases.

A third dataset which was merged into the police dataset provided information about all marijuana grow operations attended to by fire departments in the Lower Mainland region of the province. This dataset was provided by the Surrey Fire Service and included data from seven policing jurisdictions in the Lower Mainland that had EFSI teams in place for at least some of the four-year period between when some of the teams first began in 2005 and 2008. The jurisdictions involved included Surrey, Coquitlam/Port Coquitlam, Ridge Meadows (Pitt Meadows only), Mission, Langley, Richmond, and Abbotsford.

Collectively, the teams involved in these jurisdictions attended: 267 grow operations in 2005; 270 in 2006; 980 in 2007; and 417 in 2008 for a total of 1,934 marijuana grow operations. Given the varied start-up years for each of the teams involved (e.g. Langley, Ridge Meadows, Richmond, and Coquitlam did not start until 2007, and Mission and Port Coquitlam did not start until 2008), it was not possible to do a meaningful comparative analysis of the data. Beyond that, the small numbers involved respecting most jurisdictions would have made an EFSI/non-EFSI analysis meaningless. Still, it seemed important for this particular report to include these cases as part of the police dataset as they do represent “cleared otherwise” drug files. That is, they are instances of marijuana production, but would not normally be included in police data given that, technically speaking, no offence has occurred. In this regard, it is important to remember that EFSI teams are not in place to take down marijuana grow operations. They are in place to respond to information (usually provided through BC Hydro consumption records) which suggests to them that a potential electrical or fire safety hazard exists at a particular location (some of which are accessed by the teams to have been locations of marijuana grow operations). Despite the assessments, there is never an intention to charge anyone involved; the team’s only interest is to ensure that the location is ultimately rendered safe.

At the end of the day, grow operations discovered by EFSI teams should not show up in police statistics. The researchers’ decision to include them is based on the fact that, despite the technical issue, such instances are known instances of marijuana production that might have otherwise been attended to by police. To exclude them would, in effect, be knowingly underestimating the total number of marijuana production cases. Furthermore, there are very good indications that the presence of an EFSI team does work to significantly decrease grow operations in jurisdictions where they are in place (Girn, 2007). At the same time, the researchers recognize that adding these cases to the database may result in an over counting of the number of production cases to the extent that there may be some instances where such cases have already been counted by police as “cleared otherwise”. However, the researchers included them so as to err on the side of caution.

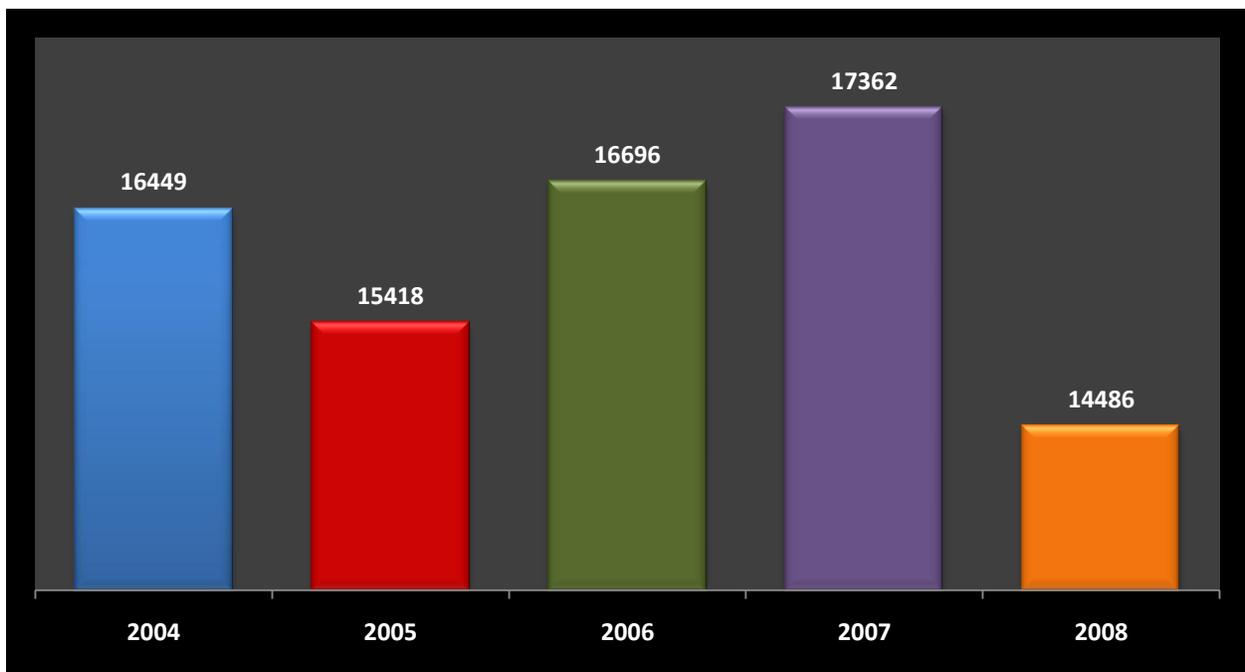
In terms of the analyses conducted, attention was first given to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory dataset alone and associated changes/differences with respect to year of incident, district, and type of drug. This was followed by attention to the police database and its associated changes/differences with respect to year of incident, district, type of drug, type of offence, and clearance status. Finally, the analyses focused on a comparison of Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory and police data with specific attention to selected jurisdictions.

Research Results

Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory Data

All police detachments in British Columbia send drug sample evidence associated to drug files to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for analysis. As noted in the Methodology section, between 2004 and 2008, a total of 80,411 drug samples were sent by British Columbia police agencies to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for analysis. However, over this time period, the number of submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for drug analysis decreased by 11.9%, from 16,449 in 2004 to 14,486 in 2008 (Figure 1).

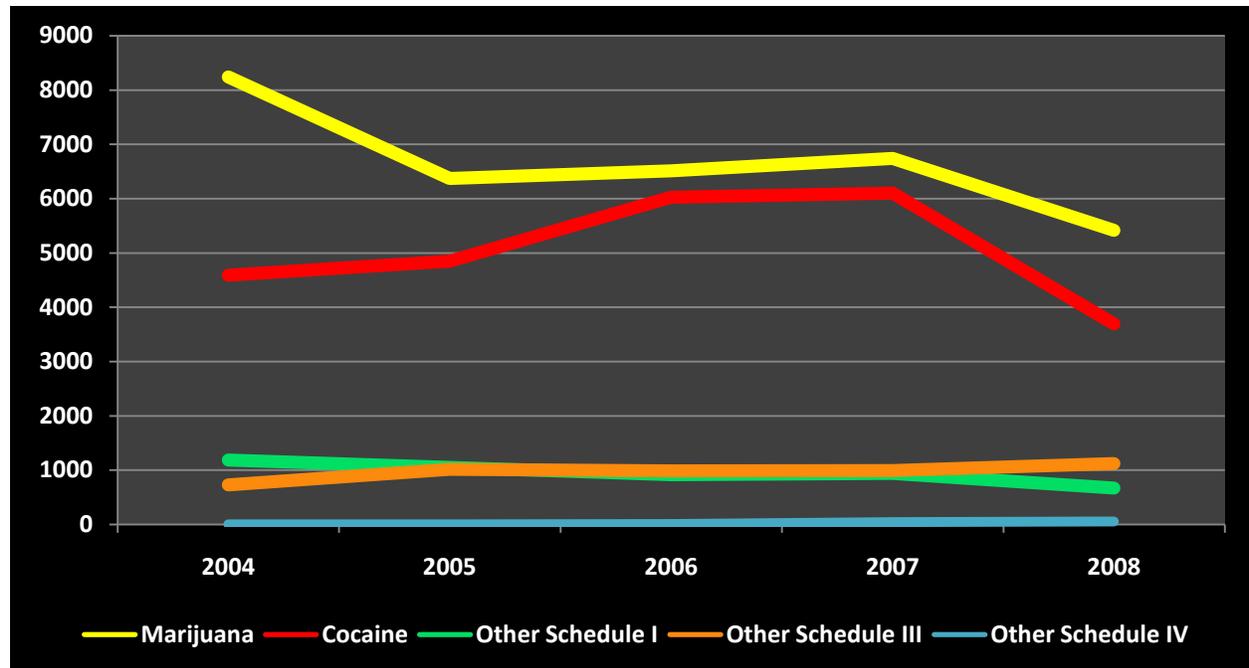
Figure 1: Numbers of Drug Submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for Analysis 2004-2008



To determine whether this decreasing trend was apparent for different drugs, the patterns of drug submissions were examined for each of the following major drug types: Marijuana; Cocaine; Other Schedule I drugs (e.g. methamphetamine, heroin); Schedule III drugs (e.g. LSD, MDMA); and Schedule IV drugs (e.g. steroids). As indicated by Figure 2, with the exception of Schedule III and IV drugs, generally, all of the other drug types contributed to the overall decrease in submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory between 2004 and 2008. Specifically, between 2004 and 2008, the amount of marijuana submissions decreased by approximately one-third (34.3 per cent), while the number of cocaine submissions decreased by approximately one-fifth (19.6 per cent). Similarly,

submissions for other Schedule I drugs, such as methamphetamine and heroin, decreased by nearly half (43.4 per cent).

Figure 2: Drug Cases sent to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory from 2004 to 2008

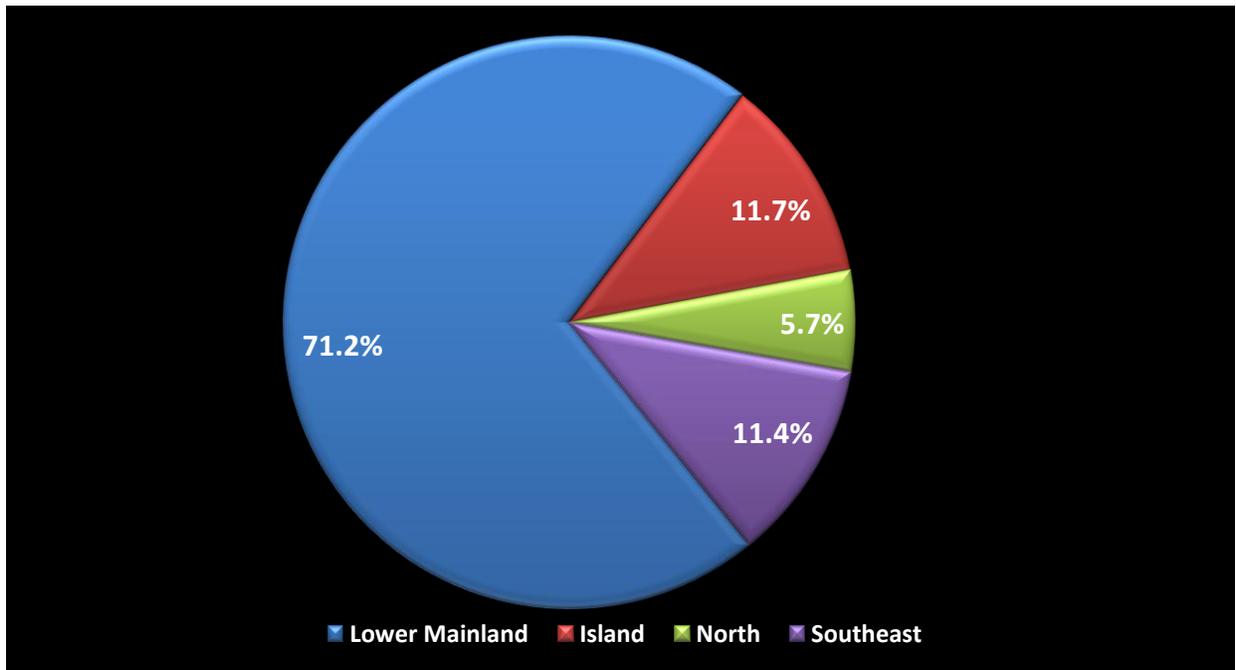


In contrast, two categories of drugs increased fairly substantially; however, these increases can be explained by the low baseline numbers in 2004. Still, submissions for Schedule III drugs, such as LSD, MDMA, and Psilocybin, doubled from 730 in 2004 to 1,120 in 2008 (53.4 per cent increase), while Schedule IV drug (e.g. steroids) submissions increased from no submissions in 2004 to 54 submissions in 2008.¹

These analyses were repeated with a focus on the district in British Columbia that made the submission. Again, as noted above, for the purposes of this study, British Columbia was divided into four regions: the Lower Mainland (e.g. Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, Abbotsford); the Island (e.g. Victoria, Saanich, Tofino, Alert Bay); the North (e.g. Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, McBride, Prince George); and the Southeast (e.g. Kamloops, Lillooet, Clearwater, Okanagan). As indicated by Figure 3, the overwhelming majority of drug submissions came from the Lower Mainland (71.2 per cent).

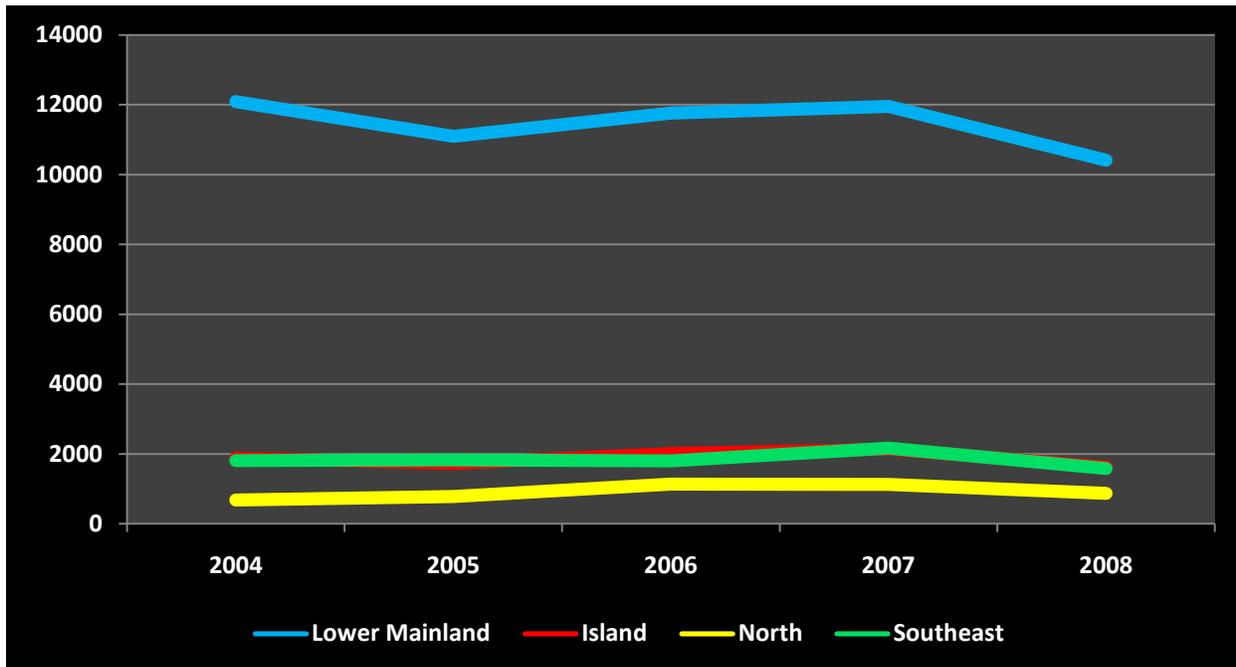
¹ Given the small proportions for Schedule IV drugs, the remainder of the Health Canada analyses considered only Marijuana, Cocaine, Other Schedule I drugs, and Schedule III drugs.

Figure 3: Proportion of Drug Submissions by District



As indicated by Figure 4, each district, with the exception of the North, experienced a decrease for drug file submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory from 2004 to 2008. The Lower Mainland and the Island shared nearly equal rates of decreasing submissions over this time period (-13.8 per cent and -13.6 per cent, respectively), while the Southeast experienced a slightly lower decrease (-12.8 per cent). In contrast, the rates of drug submissions from the North increased from 673 in 2004 to 869 in 2008 representing a 29.1% increase in the number of submissions. One possible explanation for this increase may be the relatively low base rates in drug submissions for 2004 in the North compared to the other three districts.

Figure 4: Drug Submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory from 2004 to 2008 by District



In terms of the specific types of drugs submitted to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for analysis by district, when considering only marijuana, cocaine, Schedule I drugs, and Schedule III drugs, the Lower Mainland represents nearly three-quarters of submissions for these particular drugs (70.1 per cent) combined compared to only 11.6% for the Island, 12.3% for the Southeast, and 6.0% for the North (Table 1). These proportions were subsequently compared with attention to individual drug types by district. Given the total proportions each district was responsible for, as shown in Table 1, the Lower Mainland appeared to be overrepresented in the proportions of Schedule I drugs submitted to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory (82.0% of Schedule I submissions compared to their general proportion of 70.1% of drug submissions overall). In contrast, all other districts were underrepresented in terms of their submissions for Schedule I drugs relative to their overall proportions of submissions. Moreover, the North district was slightly overrepresented in the proportion of marijuana submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory based on their overall proportions of submissions. In contrast, their submissions for Schedule I and Schedule III drugs were relatively small compared to their total representation for submissions.

Table 1: Total Drug Submissions between 2004 and 2008 by District

	Total	Marijuana	Cocaine	Schedule I	Schedule III
Lower Mainland	70.1%	67.8%	70.0%	82.0%	74.5%
Island	11.6%	11.2%	12.9%	7.7%	12.0%
North	6.0%	7.2%	5.8%	1.8%	3.5%
Southeast	12.3%	13.9%	11.3%	8.5%	10.1%

The trends for each district, with respect to the particular drugs submitted to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory, were analysed and compared to the provincial average. As shown in Table 2, for the province, marijuana, cocaine, and other Schedule I drug submissions decreased between 2004 and 2008, while the number of Schedule III submissions increased. In terms of district differences, marijuana submissions decreased by nearly half (-48.2 per cent) for the Island district, and by approximately one-third in the Lower Mainland (-35.5 per cent) and Southeast districts (-36.3 per cent). In contrast, marijuana submissions increased by approximately one-quarter (+24.5 per cent) in the North district. This increase might reflect either a greater number of marijuana grow operations being set up in the North or, as will be considered later, improved police responses to marijuana grow operations in this area.

Table 2: Percent Change from 2004 to 2008 in Drug Submissions by District

	Lower Mainland	Island	North	Southeast	BRITISH COLUMBIA
Marijuana	-35.5	-48.2	+24.5	-36.3	- 34.3%
Cocaine	-29.0	+3.5	+4.4	+15.0	- 19.6%
Other Schedule I	-46.0	-47.7	-24.0	-13.6	- 43.4%
Schedule III	+67.4	-7.8	+114.3	+37.1	+ 53.4%

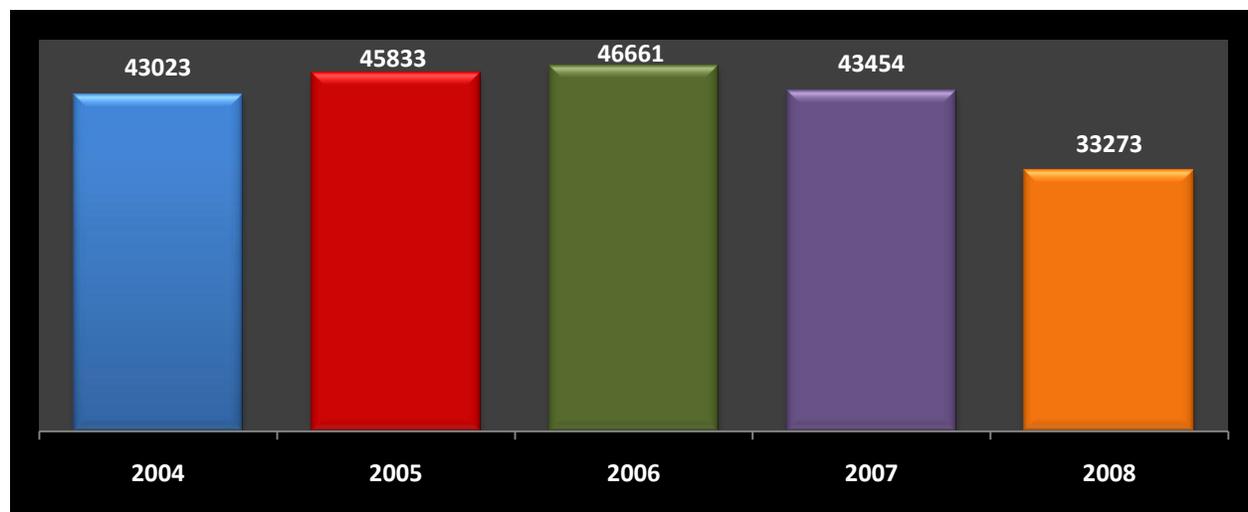
Cocaine submissions also decreased by nearly one-third (-29.0 per cent) for the Lower Mainland; however, they increased slightly in the other three districts (see Table 2). Other Schedule I drug submissions also decreased in all four districts, with the greatest changes occurring in the Lower Mainland (-46.0 per cent) and the Island (-47.7 per cent). The largest increases in drug submissions occurred for Schedule III drugs. These increases were primarily driven by a greater than 100% increase in the North, a two-thirds (+67.4 per cent) increase in the Lower Mainland, and a one-third (+37.1 per cent) increase in the Southeast. However, it is important to note that the 114.3% increase in Schedule III drug submissions in the North represented a change from only 14 submissions in 2004 to 30 in 2008. The only jurisdiction in which Schedule III drug submissions decreased was in the Island district; however, this decrease represented only a slight difference, from 116 submissions in 2004 to 107 in 2008 or a 7.8% decrease.

As mentioned in the Methodology section, in addition to examining drug submissions from police agencies in British Columbia to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory, data was also collected from these police agencies on the number, type, offence, and clearance status of drug files between 2004 and 2008.

Quantity and Location of Police Agency Drug Files

In total, and again as noted in the Methodology section, 212,244 drug files (including 1,934 EFSI files) from police agencies in British Columbia between 2004 and 2008 were included in this study. As indicated by Figure 5, while there were a relatively consistent number of files generated between 2004 and 2007, there was a notable reduction in the overall number of files in 2008. In fact, comparing 2004 to 2008, there was a 22.7% reduction in drug files. In effect, with the exception of 2008, which contributed 15.7% of all the drug-related files over the five year time period, the other four years each contributed nearly equal proportions ranging from a high of 22.0% in 2006 to a low of 20.3% in 2004.

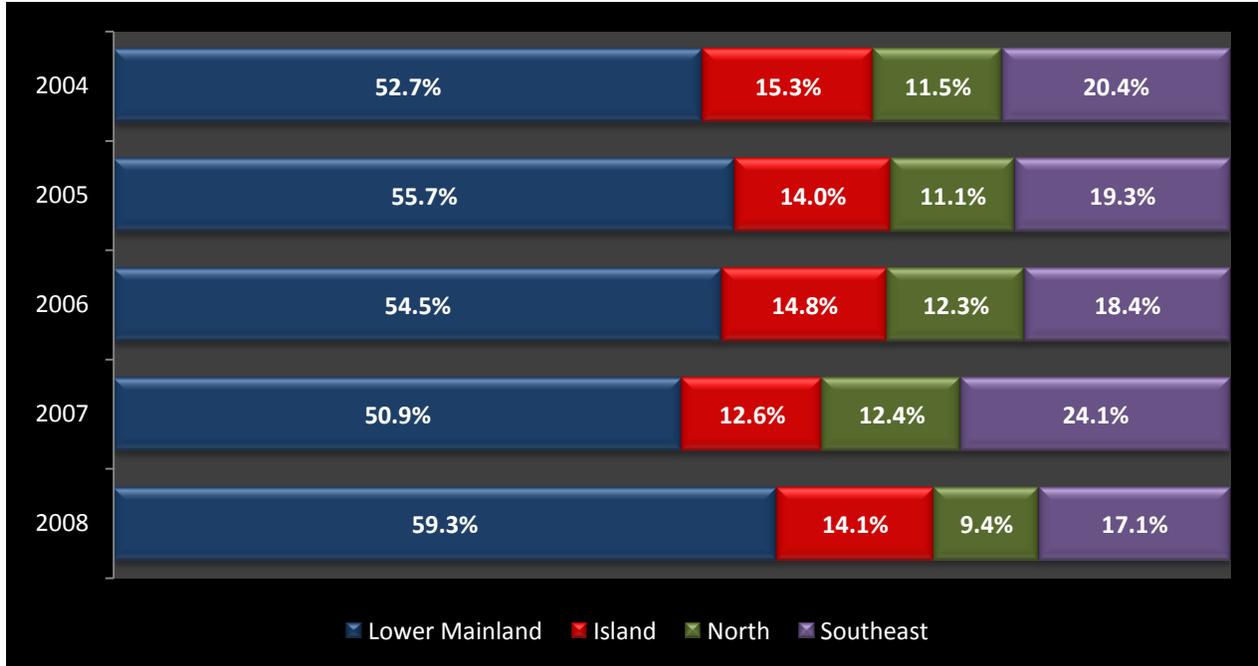
Figure 5: Distribution of Files from 2004 to 2008



As might be expected, the majority of files (54.4 per cent) were generated in the Lower Mainland district of British Columbia. Much smaller proportions of files were generated in the other three districts. Specifically, the Southeast district contributed one-fifth of the files followed by the Island district (14.2 per cent) and the North district (11.4 per cent). These proportions remained relatively stable throughout the five year time period. In other words, the Lower Mainland fluctuated between contributing a low of 50.9% of all files for 2007 to a high of 59.3% of all files in 2008. In the Southeast district, the year which contributed the lowest proportion of files was in 2008 (17.1 per cent of all files that year) to a high of 24.1% in 2007. In fact, only the Island district varied slightly from this pattern

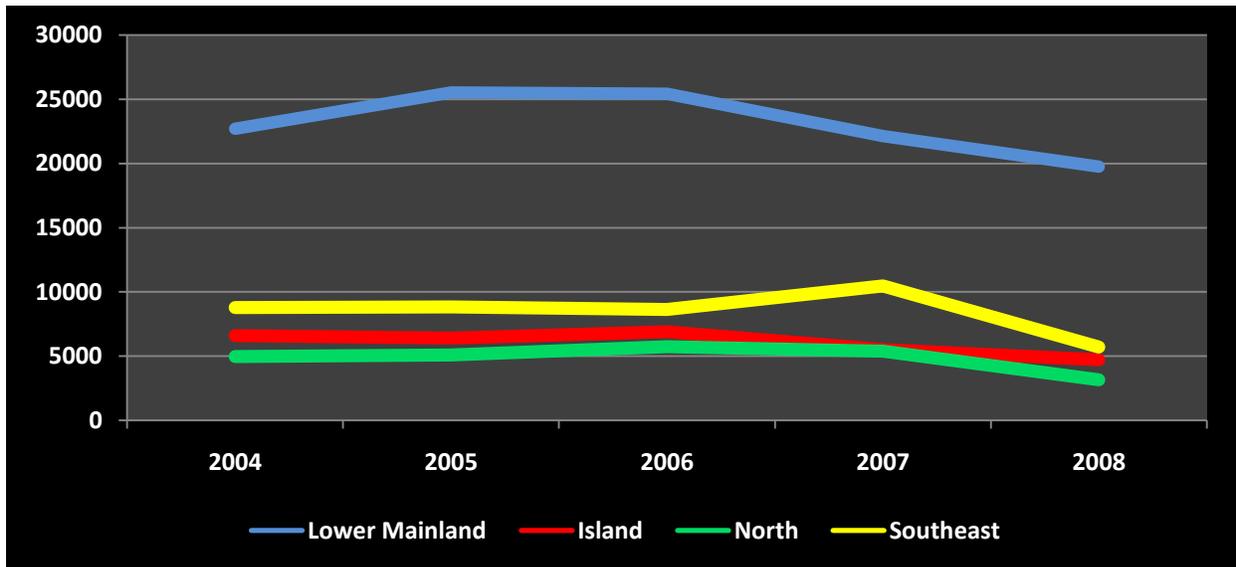
of having a district's lowest contribution be in 2008 and their largest contribution coming in 2007. In the Island district, their largest contribution was in 2004 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Proportion of Drug Files by District for each Year



Importantly, all of the districts experienced a decline in their number of drug-related files from 2004 to 2008. The district with the largest decline was the North with a 36.7% reduction, closely followed by the Southeast district (35.1 per cent). The Island district experienced a 28.7% decrease in the number of drug-related files and the Lower Mainland had a 13.0% decrease (see Figure 7). Again, the reduction for the entire sample was 22.7%, suggesting that the North and Southeast districts' reductions were above the mean, while the reductions in the Island and the Lower Mainland were less than the average.

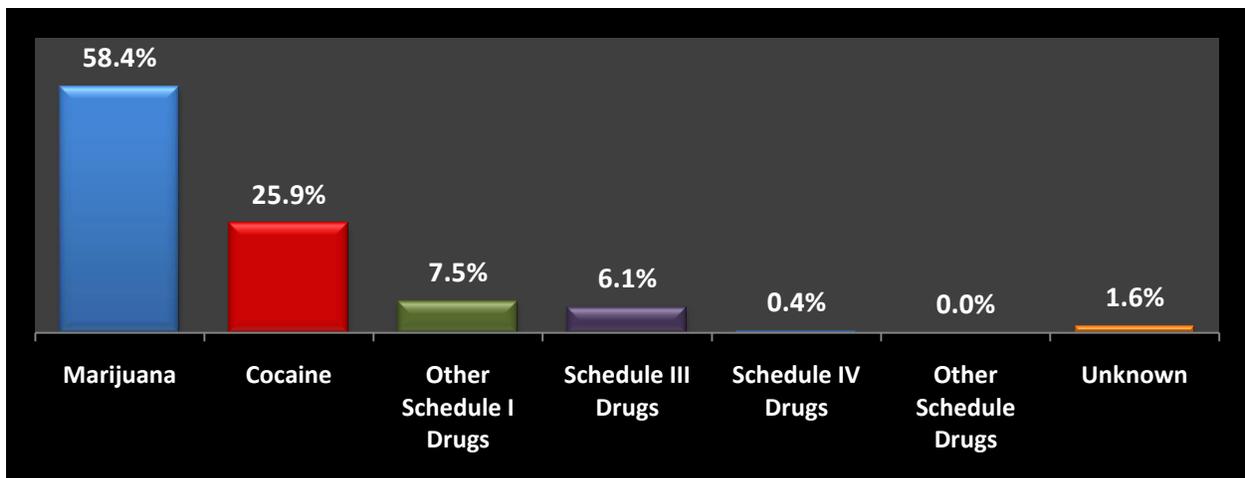
Figure 7: Distribution of Files from 2004 to 2008 by District



Types of Drugs and the Nature of Drug Offences

As indicated by Figure 8, the majority of drug files for the entire sample were marijuana cases (58.4 per cent). However, approximately one-quarter (25.9 per cent) were for cocaine. In effect, the overwhelming majority of files were either for marijuana or cocaine (84.3 per cent).

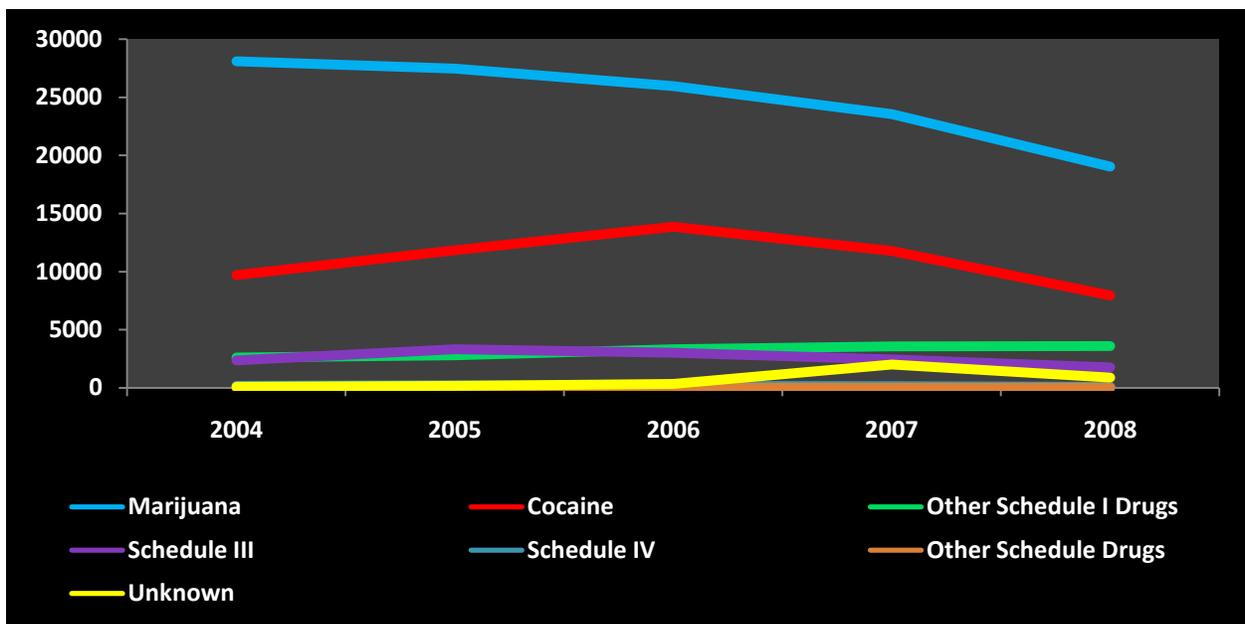
Figure 8: Distribution of Drug Types



Again, this distribution was remarkably consistent over the five years; however, what was interesting was the consistent decline in different types of drug files between 2004 and 2008 (see Figure 9). Specifically, there was a 32.3% decrease in the marijuana files and an

18.1% decrease in cocaine files throughout the time period. There was an equally large decrease (25.5 per cent) in the number of Schedule III drugs and a substantial decrease (50.3 per cent) in the number of Schedule IV drug files. The only drug type with an increase was the other Schedule I drugs (+37.2 per cent). It is important to keep in mind that this category comprised all “hard” drugs with the exception of cocaine. Although this drug category made up a small proportion of all files, the fact that there was a notable increase in the raw number of files associated to “hard” drugs might indicate that as the number of files decreased over time, particularly marijuana files, police had a greater capacity to respond to more serious drug files.

Figure 9: Distribution of Drug Types from 2004 to 2008



In considering whether specific districts contributed more to the aforementioned increases or decreases, there were some interesting variations. As indicated in Table 3, one constant was that the reductions in files by drug type over time were smaller in the Lower Mainland than in the other three districts. For example, while the Lower Mainland experienced a substantial decrease between 2004 and 2008 for the raw number of marijuana files (23.0 per cent), the decreases over the same time period for marijuana files was 45.4% in the Southeast district, 40.4% in the North district, and 37.5% in the Island district. Similarly, while there was an overall reduction by 9.1% for cocaine files in the Lower Mainland between 2004 and 2008, the reductions in the Island, North, and Southeast districts were 10.4%, 38.2%, and 31.8%, respectively. With respect to Schedule III Drugs, only the North district had a decrease smaller than the Lower Mainland (10.1 per cent compared to 24.0 per cent).

Another minor exception to this trend was with the overall increases associated with Schedule I Drugs excluding cocaine. In this case, while all districts saw increases in the number of files generated for this drug type over the five year period, there was only a slight increase in the Island district (5.6 per cent), while there were substantial increases in the other three districts (see Table 3).

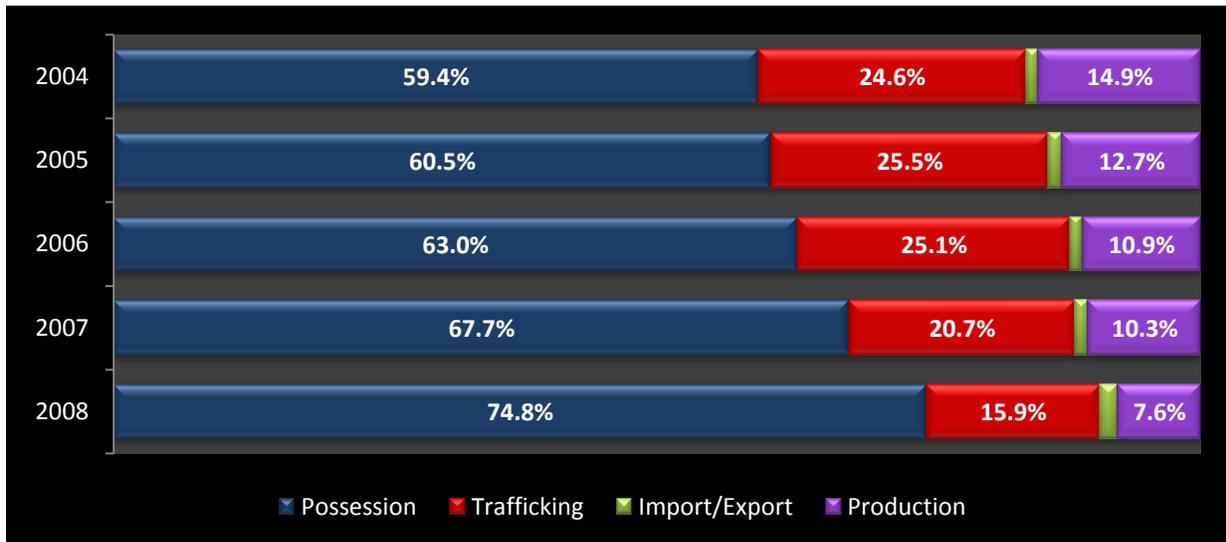
Table 3: Percentage Change in the Raw Number of Files between 2004 and 2008 by District and Drug Type

	Lower Mainland	Island	North	Southeast	BRITISH COLUMBIA
Marijuana	- 23.0%	- 37.5%	- 40.4%	- 45.4%	- 32.3%
Cocaine	- 9.1%	- 10.4%	- 38.2%	- 31.8%	- 18.1%
Other Schedule I	+ 37.8%	+ 5.6%	+ 61.7%	+ 83.1%	+ 37.2%
Schedule III Drugs	- 24.0%	- 36.5%	- 10.1%	- 29.4%	- 25.5%

All files were analysed for the type of drug offence they were related to. The files were designated one of four classifications: (1) Drug Possession Files; (2) Drug Trafficking Files; (3) Drug Import/Export Files; and (4) Drug Production Files. Nearly two-thirds of all files (64.4 per cent) were drug possession files. By way of contrast, only slightly more than one-fifth of files (22.8 per cent) were for drug trafficking, while far fewer files were for drug production (11.5 per cent) or drug importing/exporting (1.3 per cent).

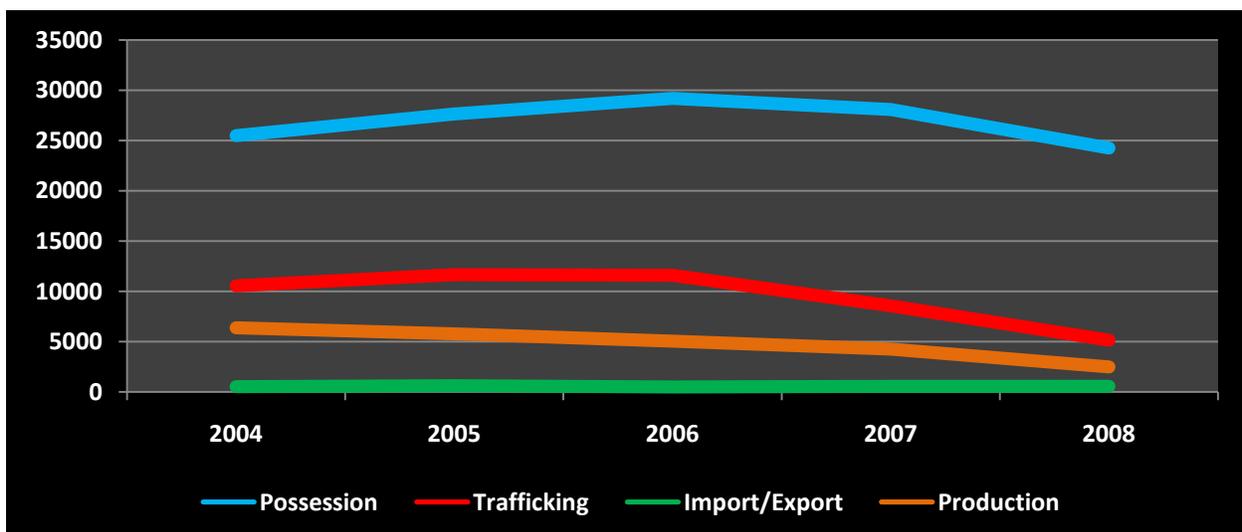
Of note, while there was a consistent decrease in the proportion of production files from 14.9% in 2004 to 7.6% of all files in 2008, and a general decrease in the proportion of trafficking files from 24.6% of all drug files in 2004 to 15.9% of all drug files in 2008, possession files consistently comprised a larger and larger proportion of the drug files in each year. As indicated by Figure 10, while possession files made up nearly 60% of all files in 2004, this proportion grew to approximately three-quarters of all files (74.8 per cent) in 2008.

Figure 10: Distribution of Offence Type from 2004 to 2008



Although the relative proportions of drug offence types changed over the designated time period, regardless of drug offence type, with the minor exception of drug import/export files (+4.2%), there was a consistent pattern of a decrease in the number of files for each drug offence type over time. As indicated in Figure 11, there was a 4.9% decrease in the number of possession files between 2004 and 2008, and there were very large decreases for trafficking files (-51.2 per cent) and production files (-61.3 per cent). This might suggest that a consequence of the steady decline in drug files overall was an opportunity for the police and other agencies to allocate more resources to trafficking and production, thus further reducing the occurrence of these types of offences over time.

Figure 11: Distribution of Drug Offence Type between 2004 and 2008



As indicated by Table 4, when considering just the possession files by drug type and district, several clear patterns emerged. The drug type with the fewest files, namely the Schedule III drugs, province-wide, there was a 22.8% decrease in files from 2004 to 2008. Moreover, each district had reductions of possession files in all districts between 2004 and 2008. These reductions ranged from a 2.3% reduction in the North district to a 36.7% reduction in the Southeast district. For the most common drug type, i.e. marijuana, there was an 11.7% decrease province-wide. While there was a slight increase in possession files over the time period in the Lower Mainland, there were substantial decreases in these types of files in all other districts. Moreover, these reductions were relatively consistent in that the range was a decrease of 20.2% for possession files in the Island district to a decrease of 31.3% in the Southeast district. While all districts had a reduction in the number of cocaine related possession files, the decreases ranged from 2.6% in the Lower Mainland to 86.7% in the Island district. Province-wide, there was a 4.5% decrease in cocaine possession files from 2004 to 2008. Finally, there were large increases in the number of possession files for all districts related to other Schedule I drugs with a province-wide increase of 107.9%.

Table 4: Percentage Change in the Raw Number of Drug Possession Files between 2004 and 2008 by District

	Marijuana	Cocaine	Other Schedule I Drugs	Schedule III Drugs
Lower Mainland	+ 3.0%	- 2.6%	+ 117.3%	- 20.2%
Island	- 20.2%	- 86.7%	+ 67.2%	- 28.9%
North	- 26.3%	- 7.1%	+ 126.5%	- 2.3%
Southeast	- 31.3%	- 26.8%	+ 89.1%	- 36.7%
BRITISH COLUMBIA	- 11.7%	- 4.5%	+ 107.9%	- 22.8%

The same analysis was conducted on the data considering drug trafficking files instead of drug possession files. Province-wide, there were decreases for all drug types (see Table 5). The largest decreases were for marijuana trafficking files (69.5 per cent) and other Schedule I trafficking files (61.6 per cent). Smaller decreases were found for cocaine trafficking files (32.3 per cent) and Schedule III drugs (24.7 per cent). It was interesting to note that, with the exception of cocaine-related files, the North district had substantial increases in the raw number of drug trafficking files generated. Conversely, with the exception of a slight increase in the Southeast district for Schedule III drugs, all districts had substantial decreases in the number of drug trafficking files, regardless of drug type (see Table 5).

Table 5: Percentage Change in the Raw Number of Drug Trafficking Files between 2004 and 2008 by District

	Marijuana	Cocaine	Other Schedule I Drugs	Schedule III Drugs
Lower Mainland	- 71.7%	- 16.7%	- 62.2%	- 29.5%
Island	- 67.1%	- 40.1%	- 69.6%	- 50.0%
North	+ 86.8%	- 55.7%	+ 98.2%	+ 186.7%
Southeast	- 69.6%	- 36.7%	- 34.6%	+ 6.6%
BRITISH COLUMBIA	- 69.5%	- 32.3%	- 61.6%	- 24.7%

Again, the same type of analysis was conducted focusing on drug production files. When considering the data presented in Table 6, it must be kept in mind that the number of cocaine production files was extremely low in all districts. For example, the Lower Mainland had five production files in both 2004 and 2008, the Island had two files in 2004 and one file in 2008, the North had one file in 2004 and none in 2008, and the Southeast had two files in 2004 and four in 2008. Similar low numbers were found for the other Schedule I drugs and Schedule III drugs. Given this, only the marijuana production files will be discussed.²

Despite the low numbers, there were reductions in all drug types, except for cocaine, in the number of drug production files between 2004 and 2008. The largest decrease was for other Schedule I drug files (-70.3 per cent), while the most frequent type of drug production file, namely marijuana files, had a decrease of 61.3%. Of note, there were eight cocaine production files in both 2004 and 2008. There was also a 65.7% decrease in the number of Schedule III drug production files over this time period.

Following the general patterns discussed throughout this report, marijuana production files decreased in all jurisdictions between 2004 and 2008. Moreover, the decreases were relatively similar in all four districts with a range of 57.5% in the Lower Mainland to a high of a 70.0% decrease in the Island district (see Table 6). This was not unexpected given that the Lower Mainland had the largest number of drug production files and the Island district had the lowest.

² Similarly small numbers were found when considering the import/export data. Given this, an analysis of these few files was not included in this report.

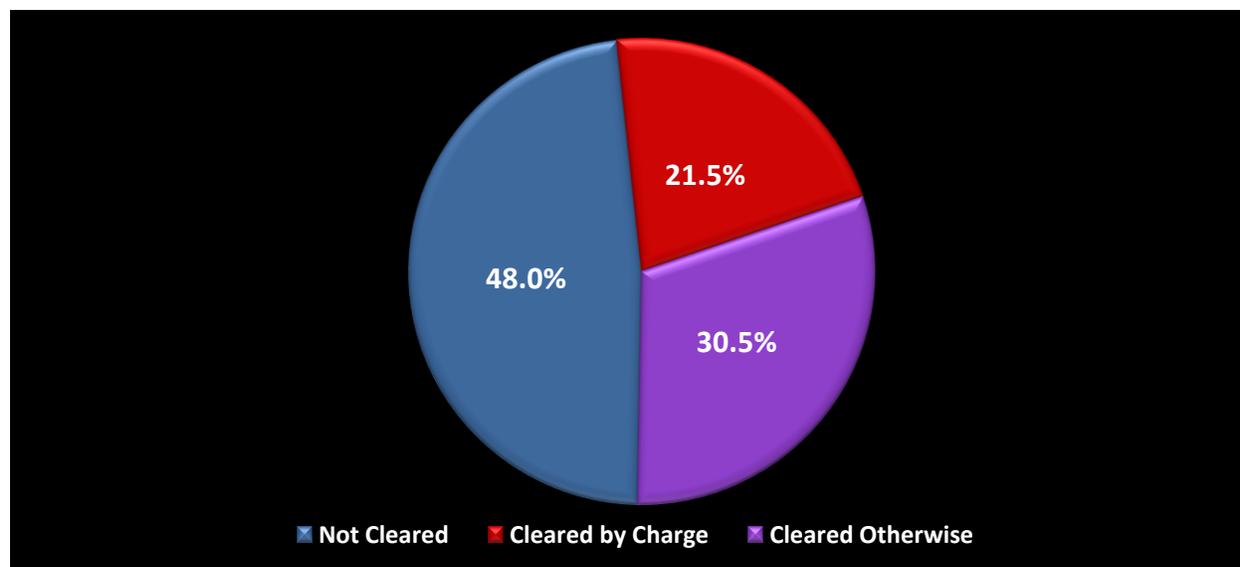
Table 6: Percentage Change in Raw Number of Drug Production Files between 2004 and 2008 by District

	Marijuana	Cocaine	Other Schedule I Drugs	Schedule III Drugs
Lower Mainland	- 57.5%	0	-75.0%	- 64.9%
Island	- 70.0%	- 50.0%	-60.0%	- 85.7%
North	- 61.1%	+ 100%	-61.1%	- 77.8%
Southeast	- 63.4%	- 100%	+100%	- 44.4%
BRITISH COLUMBIA	- 61.3%	0	- 70.3%	- 65.7%

Clearance of Drug Offences

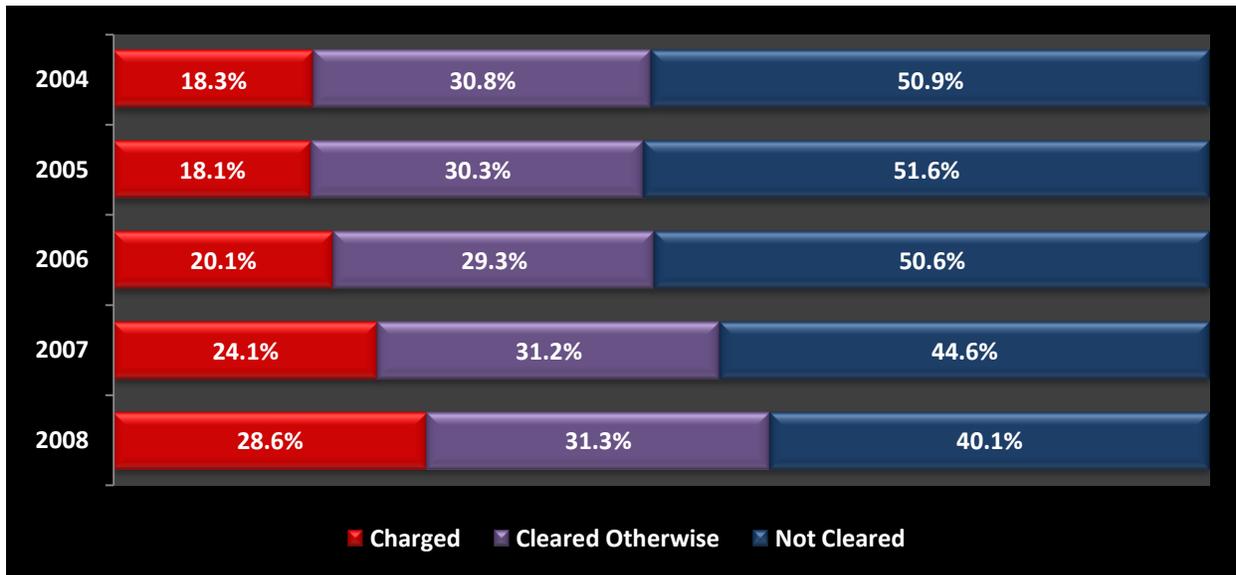
In terms of clearances, overall, nearly half of the files (48.0 per cent) were not cleared. Of the remaining files (n = 110,324), nearly one-third (30.5 per cent) were cleared otherwise and slightly more than one-fifth (21.5 per cent) were cleared by charge (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Distribution of Clearance Status 2004 to 2008



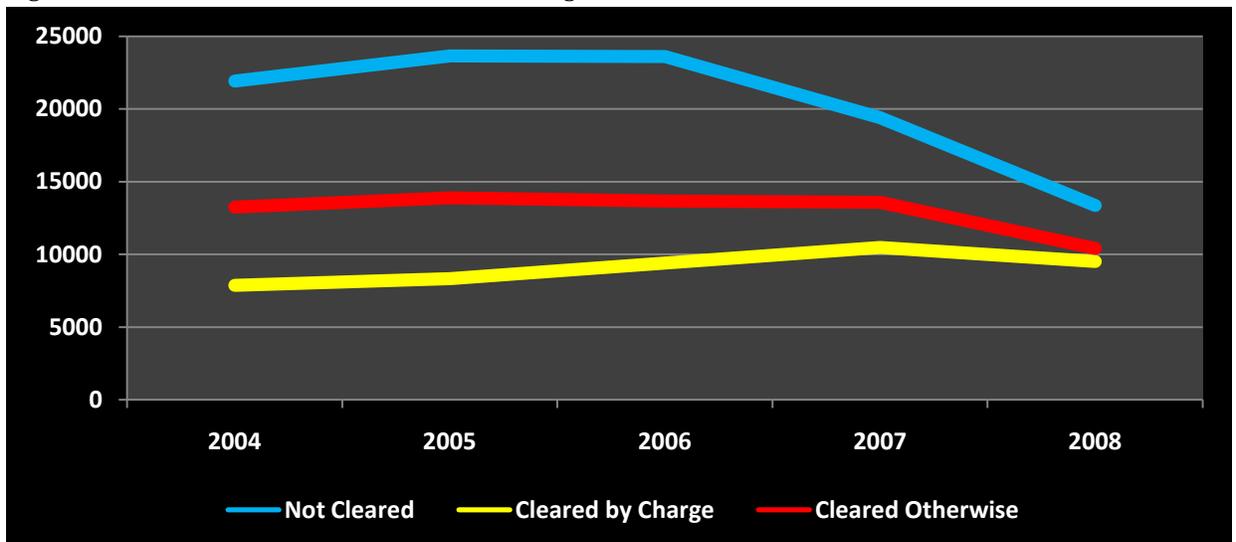
There were some interesting variations when clearance rates were considered over the five years. For example, while the proportion of cases cleared otherwise remained relatively stable over the time period (a low of 29.3% in 2006 and a high of 31.3% in 2008), there was a steady increase for cleared by charge (a low of 18.1% in 2004 and a high of 28.6% in 2008) (see Figure 13). However, the proportion of drug files not cleared declined from a high of 50.9% in 2004 to a low of 40.1% in 2008. This represented a 39.1% decrease in the raw number of files not cleared over this time period.

Figure 13: Proportion of Clearances in Each Year between 2004 and 2008



Again, while the overall number of files decreased between 2004 and 2008, there was a slight increase in the number of files cleared by charge. Specifically, there was an 8.8% increase in the overall amount of charge files in 2008 from 2004. Over the same time period, there was a substantial decrease in the number of files cleared otherwise (-21.5 per cent) and, as mentioned above, not cleared (-39.1 per cent) (see Figure 14). In effect, it would appear that as the volume of files decreased over time, the ability of the police to clear files increased.

Figure 14: Distribution of Clearance Status of Drug Files between 2004 and 2008



In considering the change over time of clearance status by district, two clear patterns emerged. First, all of the districts experienced an increase in the number of files cleared by charge from 2004 to 2008. The smallest increase was in the Island district (+9.2%), while the largest increase was in the Southeast district (+31.7 per cent). Second, all the districts experienced a decrease in the raw number of files cleared otherwise. Here, the range was from a 6.3% decrease in the Lower Mainland to a 47.3% decrease in the North district. With respect to the not cleared files, all districts, with the exception of the Island district, saw substantial decreases, with a range of 34.0% to 55.0%. Only the Island district experienced an increase in the raw number of drug files that were not cleared. In effect, it would appear that as the overall number of files decreased, districts had more files cleared by charge and fewer files not cleared or cleared otherwise over the five year period (see Table 7).

Table 7: Percentage Change in the Raw Number of Clearance Status between 2004 and 2008 by District

	Not Cleared	Cleared by Charge	Cleared Otherwise
Lower Mainland	- 34.0%	+ 20.2%	- 6.3%
Island	+ 37.4%	+ 9.2%	- 25.0%
North	- 45.0%	+ 30.3%	- 47.3%
Southeast	- 55.0%	+ 31.7%	- 41.1%
BRITISH COLUMBIA	- 42.5%	+ 20.9%	- 21.7%

In terms of the four most common drug types discussed above, there was relative stability in the proportions not cleared (see Table 8). Regardless of drug type, nearly half of the files were not cleared. Given this, a slight majority of files were either cleared by charge or cleared otherwise.

Table 8: Distribution of Clearance Status by Drug Type

	Not Cleared	Cleared by Charge	Cleared Otherwise
Marijuana	48.0%	14.5%	37.4%
Cocaine	45.1%	34.1%	20.8%
Other Schedule I Drugs	51.6%	28.7%	19.7%
Schedule III Drugs	42.5%	31.4%	26.0%

In considering increases or decreases over time, with the exception of other Schedule I drugs, there were substantial decreases in the raw number of files from 2004 to 2008. Interestingly, while there were increases in the number of files cleared by charge for marijuana (+13.5 per cent) and cocaine (+30.9 per cent), there were decreases for other Schedule I drugs (-51.8 per cent) and Schedule III drugs (-10.2 per cent). There was also the clear pattern of a decrease for all drug types in the number of files cleared otherwise over the five years (see Table 9).

Table 9: Percentage Change in the Raw Number of Clearance Status between 2004 and 2008 by Drug Type

	Not Cleared	Cleared by Charge	Cleared Otherwise
Marijuana	- 47.9%	+ 13.5%	- 25.5%
Cocaine	- 50.7%	+ 30.9%	- 14.2%
Other Schedule I Drugs	+ 32.9%	- 51.8%	- 31.0%
Schedule III Drugs	- 32.8%	- 10.2%	- 31.7%

The data was generally positive with respect to offence type and clearance status over time. For example, over the five year period, there was an overall slight decrease in the number of drug possession files that were not cleared (-7.9 per cent), but a large increase in the number of drug possession files cleared otherwise (+23.0 per cent) and cleared by charge (+59.7 per cent). However, with respect to drug trafficking files, there were decreases in the raw number of files for all three categories of clearance status over the five years. Positively, there was a 73.3% decrease in the number of drug trafficking files not cleared between 2004 and 2008, and only a 6.9% decrease in the number of files cleared by charge. However, there was a 42.2% decrease in the number of trafficking files cleared otherwise.

When considering district differences over the five year period by drug type and clearance status, several patterns emerged (see Table 10). For files not cleared, the Island district was the only district that experienced a decrease in files regardless of drug type. Moreover, the decreases were quite substantial ranging from a 29.6% decrease for not cleared Other Schedule I drugs to a 56.5% decrease in the number of marijuana files. Moreover, all districts had a substantial decrease in the number of cocaine-related files in 2008 compared to 2004. Similarly, while the decreases were smaller, all districts had a decrease in not cleared Schedule III files.

While not the case for all drug types, most districts experienced an increase in cleared by charge files. The largest increases were associated with Other Schedule I drugs. Moreover, the Lower Mainland experienced increases in the number of files cleared by charge for all drug types, with the exception of a small decrease in Schedule III files (-12.7 per cent). Similarly, the North district had large increases with the minor exception of cocaine cleared by charge files (-3.9 per cent), and the Southeast district had substantial increases with the exception of Schedule III drugs, which had a very small decrease in the number of cleared by charge files (-2.8 per cent).

Three of the four districts saw a decrease in the number of cleared otherwise files for all drugs except Other Schedule I drugs. These districts were the Lower Mainland, North, and Island districts. With the exception of cocaine-related cleared otherwise files, it is unclear why the other three districts also experienced decreases, some substantial decreases, for

marijuana and cocaine related files, but the Island district did not. Nonetheless, all districts experienced a decrease in cleared otherwise files for Schedule III drugs.

Table 10: Percentage Change between 2004 and 2008 for Clearance Status by Drug Type and District

	Lower Mainland	Island	North	Southeast
NOT CLEARED				
Marijuana	+ 41.3%	- 56.5%	- 47.7%	- 59.4%
Cocaine	- 43.5%	- 50.2%	- 50.3%	- 59.5%
Other Schedule I	+ 36.8%	- 29.6%	+ 50.7%	+ 91.1%
Schedule III	- 33.5%	- 40.8%	- 11.9%	- 33.8%
CLEARED by CHARGE				
Marijuana	+ 13.6%	- 14.1%	+ 55.2%	+ 20.0%
Cocaine	+ 29.3%	+ 35.6%	- 3.9%	+ 57.5%
Other Schedule I	+ 46.1%	+ 56.0%	+ 90.0%	+ 83.7%
Schedule III	- 12.7%	- 21.6%	+ 39.4%	- 2.8%
CLEARED OTHERWISE				
Marijuana	- 5.6%	+ 28.5%	- 53.8%	- 46.5%
Cocaine	- 15.3%	+ 2.0%	- 38.1%	- 4.9%
Other Schedule I	+ 31.0%	+ 15.3%	+ 75.0%	+ 46.4%
Schedule III	- 20.6%	- 50.5%	- 51.4%	- 50.0%

In terms of clearance rates by offence type, there were several interesting findings. First, between 2004 and 2008, there was a decrease in the number of files that were not cleared for all drug offence types. For example, there was a 7.9% decrease in the number of possession files that were not cleared and a substantial decrease in the number of drug trafficking files (-73.2 per cent) and drug production files (-71.1 per cent) that were not cleared. There was also a decrease in the number of import/export drug files (-24.8 per cent) (see Table 11). Over the same time period, there was a substantial increase in the number of possession files (+59.7 per cent) and drug import/export files (+62.1 per cent) that were cleared by charge. However, there was also a small decrease (-6.9 per cent) in the number of drug trafficking files cleared by charge and a large decrease in the number of drug production files (-51.8 per cent) that were similarly cleared by charge. Finally, there were decreases in the number of drug possession (-22.9 per cent) and drug trafficking files (-42.9 per cent) cleared otherwise, but an increase in the number of drug import/export (+476.0 per cent) and drug production files (+14.5 per cent) cleared otherwise. In considering this data, it is important to keep in mind that, as mentioned above, drug possession and drug trafficking files comprised the majority of cases.

Table 11: Percentage Change in the Raw Number of Clearance Status between 2004 and 2008 by Offence Type

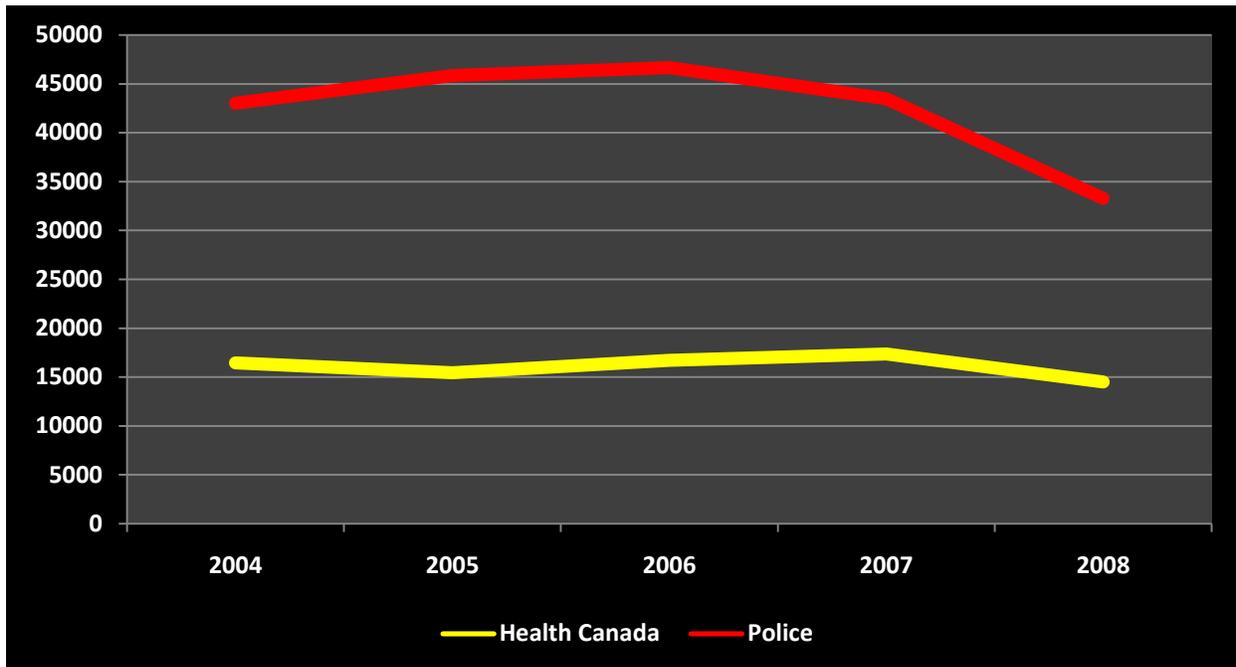
	Not Cleared	Cleared by Charge	Cleared Otherwise
Possession	- 7.9%	+ 59.7%	- 22.9%
Trafficking	- 73.2%	- 6.9%	- 42.9%
Import/Export	- 24.8%	+ 62.1%	+ 476.0%
Production	- 71.1%	- 51.8%	+ 14.5%

Given these analyses of police agency drug files, there are several key findings. The overall number of drug files decreased from 2004 to 2008 by nearly one-quarter. This decrease occurred in all districts. The most common drug types were marijuana and cocaine and there was a 32.3% decrease in marijuana files and an 18.1% decrease in cocaine files from 2004 and 2008. While all districts experienced a decrease in the number of marijuana and cocaine files, the Lower Mainland had the smallest decrease of the four districts. Moreover, the most common drug offence was possession. Over time, possession comprised a larger and larger proportion of files each year. However, there were decreases for all drug offence types over the five year period. Finally, over the five years, there was a steady increase in the number of files cleared by charge and a 39.1% decrease in the raw number of files not cleared by charge. The general pattern of an increase in files cleared by charge and a decrease in files not cleared by charged existed for all districts.

Comparative Analysis of Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory and Police Agency Data

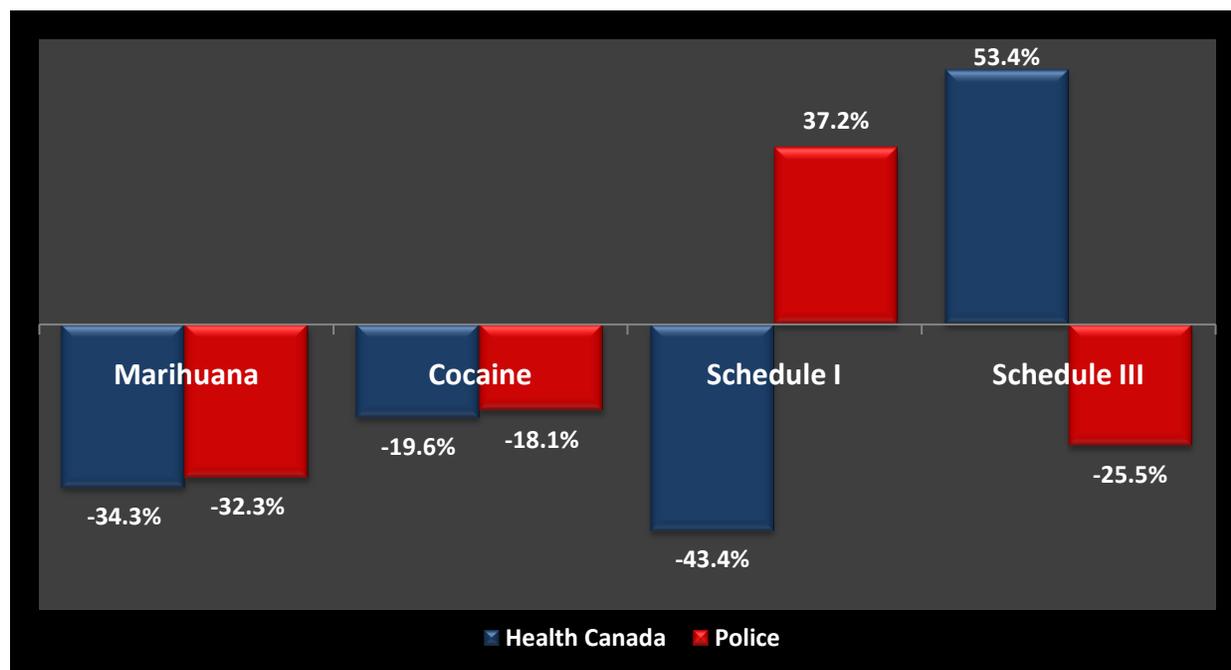
As a final analysis, the drug file trends for British Columbia police agencies and Health Canada Drug Analysis Laboratories were compared. As indicated by Figure 15, the trends in drug submissions were fairly similar, with both police and the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory experiencing a decreasing amount of drug files. Again, police agencies experienced a 22.7% decrease in the number of files they had in 2008 compared to 2004, while the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory had an 11.9% decrease in submissions. However, it is important to keep in mind that in 2008 British Columbia police agencies generated 33,273 drug files, but the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory only received 14,486 drug submissions from British Columbia in that year. By way of comparison, in 2006, which was the peak year for police agency drug files, police generated 46,661 drug files, while Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory submissions were only 16,696. In effect, while both police files and Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory submissions have generally decreased over the five year time period, the shift has been from one submission to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for every 2.6 drug files in BC in 2004 to one submission for every 2.3 drug files in 2008.

Figure 15: Number of Police Agency Files and Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory Submissions 2004 to 2008



When considering police drug files and Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory submissions by drug type, as shown in Figure 16, the decreasing amounts of marijuana and cocaine police files and submissions were nearly equal. Specifically, there was a 32.3% reduction in police marijuana files and a 34.3% reduction in the amount of marijuana submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory over the five year time period. Similarly, there was an 18.1% reduction in police cocaine files and a 19.6% reduction in cocaine submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. Interestingly, it would appear that as police agencies dealt with fewer Schedule III drug related files (-25.5 per cent), there was an increase in the proportion of submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for these types of drugs (+54.5 per cent). In contrast, many more Schedule I drug files were generated by the police over the five year time period (+37.2 per cent) than were sent to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for analysis (-43.4 per cent).

Figure 16: Drug Trends for Police Files and Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory Submissions in 2004 and 2008



Comparison of Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory and Police Agency Data by District

A final set of analyses were conducted to compare the distributions of Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory submissions and police agencies according to the most commonly contributing jurisdictions. Table 10 provides the 20 police jurisdictions that contributed the largest proportions of police drug files and submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. In total, these 20 jurisdictions contributed approximately two-thirds (67.0 per cent) of all drug-related police files in British Columbia between 2004 and 2008 and slightly more than three-quarters (77.4 per cent) of drug submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. The jurisdictions of Surrey RCMP and the Vancouver Police Department were the two largest contributors over the five year period for both drug files and submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. Specifically, Surrey RCMP contributed 12.2% of all drug files and 13.2% of all submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory, while the Vancouver Police Department provided 11.7% of all drug files and 20.2% of all drug submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory (see Table 12). In effect, the Vancouver Police Department made relatively more submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory than the Surrey RCMP. Still, the fact that these two departments contributed to most police files and submission to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory was not unexpected given that Vancouver is the largest

city in British Columbia and Surrey has the largest RCMP detachment in British Columbia. It should also be noted that Abbotsford Municipal Police, Delta Municipal Police, New Westminster Municipal Police, and Sunshine Coast Detachment were not in the top 20 for contributing police drug files, but were in the top 20 for submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory, while Prince George RCMP, North Okanagan RCMP, Fort St. John RCMP, and Penticton RCMP were in the top 20 for police drug files, but not in the top 20 for submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory.

Table 12: Distribution of Police Files and Submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory between 2004 and 2008 by Top 20 Jurisdictions

	Proportion of Police Files (n = 212,244)	Proportion of Health Canada Submissions (n = 80,411)
Surrey RCMP	12.2%	13.2%
Vancouver Police Department	11.7%	20.2%
Kelowna RCMP	6.1%	1.9%
Kamloops RCMP	3.5%	2.0%
Burnaby RCMP	3.1%	4.8%
Langley RCMP	3.1%	1.6%
Coquitlam RCMP	2.8%	3.1%
Richmond RCMP	2.8%	2.7%
Upper Fraser Valley RCMP	2.7%	2.9%
Prince George RCMP	2.5%	-
Victoria Police Department	2.2%	2.5%
Nanaimo RCMP	2.1%	1.6%
North Okanagan RCMP	2.1%	-
Ridge Meadows RCMP	1.9%	2.5%
North Vancouver RCMP	1.8%	2.5%
Comox Valley RCMP	1.5%	1.4%
Campbell River RCMP	1.4%	1.1%
Fort St John RCMP	1.2%	-
Mission RCMP	1.2%	2.1%
Penticton RCMP	1.2%	-
Abbotsford Municipal Police	-	4.3%
Delta Municipal Police	-	3.0%
New Westminster Municipal	-	2.0%
Sunshine Coast Detachment	-	2.0%

Interestingly, many jurisdictions were underrepresented in the proportion of submissions they made to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for analysis. In fact, four of the top 20 jurisdictions in terms of drug-related police files (Prince George, North Okanagan, Fort St. John, and Penticton) did not appear in the top 20 jurisdictions for drug submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. By contrast,

Abbotsford, Delta, New Westminster, and the Sunshine Coast detachment made disproportionately more submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory when considering the number of drug files generated by those detachments as they appeared in the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory top 20, but not in the top 20 for police drug files.

Over the course of the five year period, the proportion of drug cases by the top 20 police jurisdictions decreased by over one-fifth (22.7 per cent), while the proportion of drug cases submitted to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory decreased by one-tenth (10.4 per cent). As indicated by Table 13, the largest police file decreases were found in Burnaby (-64.4 per cent), Campbell River (-60.7 per cent), Prince George (-62.1 per cent), Surrey (-60.2 per cent), and the Upper Fraser Valley (60.2 per cent). In addition, virtually all jurisdictions in the top 20 saw substantial decreases in the number of drugs in 2008 compared to 2004. The Richmond Police were the only jurisdiction that had an increase in drug files (+43.6 per cent) over this time period. A major contributor to this increase was the massive increase (+538.8 per cent) in the number of Other Schedule I drug files. Another contributing factor to Richmond's increase in drug files was its comparatively low base rate in 2004. In other words, Richmond only had 39 Schedule I drug files in 2004, but this number increased to 249 in 2008. In addition, in Richmond, between 2004 and 2008, Schedule III drug files increased by 57.1% from 49 files to 77 files, while cocaine files increased by 40.0%.

Table 13: Comparison of Proportional Change in Drug Files and Submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory from 2004 and 2008 by Top 20 Jurisdictions

	% Change in Police Files 2004-2008	% Change in Submissions 2004-2008
Abbotsford Municipal Police	-	-33.4%
Burnaby RCMP	-64.4%	-47.4%
Campbell River RCMP	-60.7%	+20.8%
Comox Valley RCMP	-39.7%	-44.4%
Coquitlam RCMP	-27.4%	-37.0%
Delta Municipal Police	-	-43.0%
Fort St John RCMP	-39.6%	-
Kamloops RCMP	-41.5%	-16.3%
Kelowna RCMP	-39.2%	-12.8%
Langley RCMP	-30.3%	-19.6%
Mission RCMP	-37.6%	+376.4%
Nanaimo RCMP	-24.1%	+8.1%
New Westminster Municipal	-	-45.6%
North Okanagan RCMP	-44.3%	-
North Vancouver RCMP	-32.6%	+40.2%
Penticton RCMP	-50.4%	-
Prince George RCMP	-62.1%	-
Richmond RCMP	+43.6%	+12.1%
Ridge Meadows RCMP	-57.6%	-24.3%
Sunshine Coast Detachment	-	+20.7%
Surrey RCMP	-60.2%	-48.7%
Upper Fraser Valley RCMP	-60.2%	-64.3%
Vancouver Police Department	-6.2%	+54.2%
Victoria Police Department	+8.9%	-12.2%

Interestingly, while the Campbell River RCMP faced a nearly two-thirds reduction (-60.7 per cent) in drug files, their proportion of submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory actually increased by 20.8%. This suggests that with fewer files to respond to, their capacity to deal more effectively with drug files was enhanced. This trend was also evident for North Vancouver RCMP, who experienced a one-third reduction in files (-32.6 per cent), but a 40.2% increase in submissions sent to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for analysis. Similarly, the Vancouver Police Department experienced a 6.2% reduction in police files, but a 54.2% increase in their number of submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. The reverse was true for Victoria Police, who experienced an 8.9% increase in police files, but a corresponding small drop (-12.2 per cent) in submissions to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. Still, for the most part, the general trend was a reduction in the number of police files corresponding to a smaller reduction in the number of submissions to the

Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory. In other words, as the number of police files decreased the proportion of submissions made by a jurisdiction increased, but not as much as the decrease volume of police files.

Conclusion

Considering the analyses conducted on these datasets, it is clear that the primary reason the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory has seen a decline in the number of drug sample submissions from police agencies in British Columbia is that the raw number of drug offences coming to the attention of those agencies has declined by 22.7% over the five-year period of 2004 to 2008. Further, the fact that the decline in submissions received by the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory was 11.9% and, therefore, less than the 22.7% decline experienced by police agencies is understandable when changes to police practices respecting charging in drug cases are considered over the 2004 to 2008 period. Specifically, while there was a decline in the number of files coming to the attention of police, there has also been a raw number and relative increase in the number of police files cleared by charge since 2004 (a pattern which could be observed generally across all police districts). The end result, as already noted, has been a slight decrease in the ratio of police drug files to submission to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory from one police drug sample submission to the Health Canada Drug Analysis Service Laboratory for every 2.6 drug files in British Columbia in 2004 to one police drug sample submission for every 2.3 drug files in 2008.

Unfortunately, time and the data available for this report did not allow for the researchers to consider why there has been a drop in drug offences coming to the attention of police agencies in British Columbia over the five-year period considered for this study. It would be especially interesting to study the reasons behind this decrease since it represents a reversal of a decade of increases in police-reported drug offences in Canada leading up to at least 2002 (see Desjardins and Hooton, 2004). Further, it would be interesting to give more attention to the fact that police in British Columbia are clearing more drug cases by charge; a practice which is a significant reversal of more than two decades of declines in the number of drug cases being cleared by police in Canada (see Desjardins and Hooton, 2004).

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