



# Organized Crime Research Brief no. 3

## Sizing Meth and MDMA Markets

### BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

There are no good estimates of the size of Canadian meth and ecstasy markets. Multiplier and capture-recapture methods may be able to estimate number of users and sellers, as well as quantity consumed and exported.

Ever since their relatively recent appearance as drugs of choice among the Canadian population, methamphetamine (meth) and 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine (MDMA or ecstasy) hydrochloride have been of concern for public health and law enforcement agencies. Although various reports suggest that the issue of meth and ecstasy deserve considerable attention from policy makers and researchers, there is a lack of data on the most basic, yet crucial, issue – the size of these illegal markets.

The purpose of this report was to re-examine the scientific and grey literature on current methods of estimating the size of illegal markets, with an emphasis on the meth/MDMA markets. The review focused on different innovations in the area, with emphasis on the utility of capture-recapture and multiplier methods in estimating the size of the hidden population, and the potential for applying these methods to Canadian meth and ecstasy markets, including estimating the prevalence of users, dealers, producers, and laboratories.

A review of the most recent data available from various sources on the prevalence of meth and MDMA in Canada was conducted. Peer-reviewed articles, including published reports from important longitudinal studies in Canada, as well as surveys and publications available from the following groups were examined, including:

- United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime;
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health;
- Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction; and

- B.C Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a review of the data available on seizure and detection suggests that Canada is among the largest amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS) producing nations. For example, Canada ranked sixth in the world in meth/amphetamine seizures with 1.54 metric tonnes seized, and fourth in ecstasy seizures with 985 kilograms seized in total. But these numbers should be used and interpreted with extreme caution. For example, literature on trafficking and production also reveal that there is too much uncertainty with regards to the existing data to truly assess the role of Canada in the global ATS trade. There are no established estimates of the size of production, and the amount of ATS lab seizures remains low. While Canada ranked sixth in the world in the amount of meth/amphetamine seized in 2007 with 1.54 metric tonnes, the figure for the previous years was as low as 60 kilograms.

Results from the current available data from various surveys on the prevalence of meth and MDMA show that although Canada has recently been identified as a primary player in the global ATS trade, levels of use remain low in the student and especially in the general population, and are generally on the decline. ATS use is generally higher in specific populations (e.g. street youths, rave attendees, homosexual populations, etc.), with no discernable trends.

The review also found that both methods for estimating the size of the ATS market in Canada – multiplier methods and capture-recapture methods – have shown more promise in the past in obtaining reliable estimates of illegal populations, including drug dealers and producers.

Research findings suggest that in order to estimate the meth/MDMA markets, a maximum number of

different indicators should be collected and examined for detection of trends. These include: meth/MDMA treatment admissions; arrests for meth/MDMA-related offences; meth/MDMA-related overdoses; meth/MDMA purity levels; meth/MDMA drug prices; importation of key precursors; and domestic and overseas seizures. Also, estimating the number of drug users is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, starting point. More specifically, it is not sufficient to determine the size of production because of the position of Canada as a potential exporting country. A reliable estimate of the quantity consumed remains necessary to assess the size of potential exports.

Bouchard, Martin, and Owen Gallupe, with Karine Dercormiers. *Estimation of the Size of the Illicit Methamphetamine and MDMA Markets in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada, 2010.

For more information on organized crime research at Public Safety Canada, please contact the Organized Crime Research Unit at [ocr-rco@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:ocr-rco@ps-sp.gc.ca).

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