

WA DRUG ABUSE STRATEGY OFFICE & WA POLICE SERVICE

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SEIZURES OF ILLICIT DRUGS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA: 1998 - 2000

Introduction

This report contains an analysis undertaken by the WA Drug Abuse Strategy Office of the number of seizures based on charges laid by the West Australian Police from the March quarter 1998 to the December quarter 2000, from data provided by the *Crime Information Unit* of the West Australian Police Service.

This information reflects police activity and accordingly deals with crime which has been detected and resulted in the apprehension of an offender. The data is a count of the number of seizures where an offender has been processed in the Offence Information System (OIS). Processed cases in the OIS include arrests, summons, cautions or appearance before the Juvenile Justice Team. This data does not measure court outcomes.

There are some difficulties in relation to interpretation of data from the seizure database, which is separate from the OIS, as the data files for seizures are unstructured, lack uniform definitions and are unreliable as in some instances do not readily identifying the type of drug seized.

As there may be multiple seizures of drugs for each offence report, duplicate seizures have been removed so that the count of seizures is based on the most serious processed offence on a scale from:

- 1) sell/supply (the most serious offence);
- 2) cultivation;
- 3) manufacture; and
- 4) possession/use (the least serious offence).

The data reported in this publication is concerned with the following offences under the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1981*:

- possession/use of prohibited drugs or prohibited plants;
- possession of smoking implements;
- sell/supply of prohibited drugs or prohibited plants;
- cultivation of prohibited plants;
- manufacture of prohibited drugs; and
- other drug offences.

Annual overview

From 1998 to 1999 the number of drug seizures increased by 15.5%, from a total of 19,962 in 1998 to a total of 23,054 in 2000 (Table 1, page 2).

There were marked increases in the number of seizures for some drugs over the three year period, particularly for psychostimulant type drugs, (ie amphetamines, dexamphetamines, methylamphetamine) and designer type drugs (eg ecstasy), compared to a downward trend in the number of heroin seizures. These trends are shown in Figures 1 to 8 (pages 2 and 3).

The rate of change in the number of seizures for the different drug groups from 1998 to 2000 was as follows:

• amphetamines	↑ +97.8%
• cannabis	↓ -0.3%
• cocaine	↓ -60.8%
• dexamphetamine	↑ +113.5%
• ecstasy	↑ +77.4%
• heroin	↓ -22.4%
• LSD	↑ +14.3%
• methylamphetamine	↑ +280.5%
• morphine	↓ -7.4%
• opium	↓ -27.3%

From 1998 to 2000 there was a change in the proportion of cannabis seizures, dropping from 84% of total seizures in 1998 to 73% of all seizures in 2000 (Table 1, page 2). Over the three years the proportion of annual amphetamine seizures increased from 5.1% to 8.7% and the category of 'unknown powders' increased from 2.8% to 10.7%.

Written by Greg Swensen (May 2001) *continued on page 3*

This publication is available online at
<http://www.wa.gov.au/drugwestaus/>

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Table 1: Annual seizures by type of drug, WA, 1998-2000

	1998		1999		2000	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Amphetamine	1,019	5.1%	1,360	6.4%	2,016	8.7%
Cannabis	16,798	84.1%	17,467	82.7%	16,746	72.6%
Cocaine	79	0.4%	12	0.1%	31	0.1%
Dexamphetamine	52	0.3%	88	0.4%	111	0.5%
Ecstasy	190	1.0%	214	1.0%	337	1.5%
Heroin	852	4.3%	808	3.8%	661	2.9%
LSD	91	0.5%	77	0.4%	104	0.5%
Methylamphetamine	41	0.2%	88	0.4%	156	0.7%
Morphine	27	0.1%	40	0.2%	25	0.1%
Opium	11	0.1%	43	0.2%	14	0.1%
Other Specified	251	1.3%	255	1.2%	379	1.6%
Unknown Powder	551	2.8%	660	3.1%	2,474	10.7%
Total	19,962	100.0%	21,112	100.0%	23,054	100.0%

Figure 1: Number of amphetamine seizures

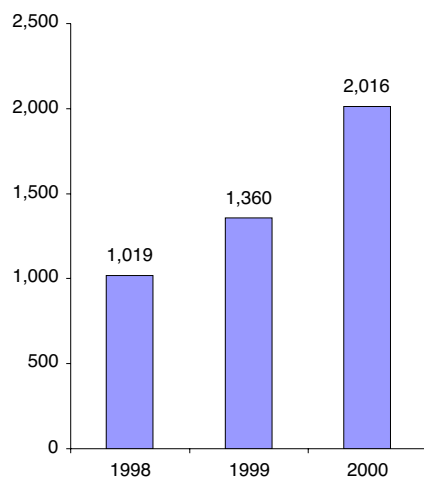


Figure 2: Number of cannabis seizures

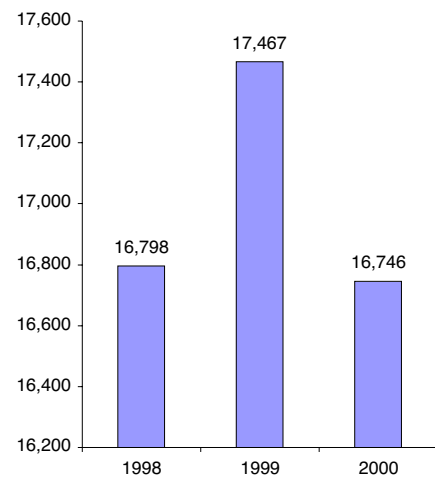


Figure 3: Number of heroin seizures

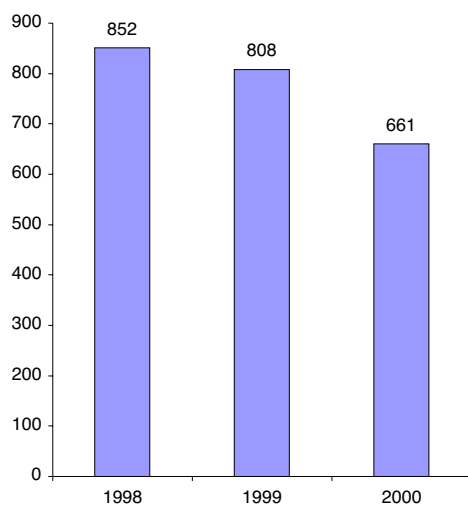
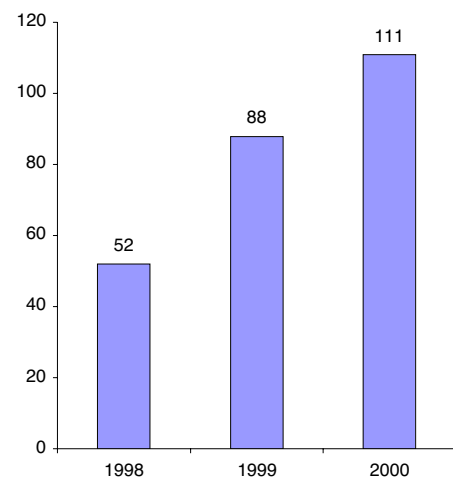


Figure 4: Number of dexamphetamine seizures



These changes in the proportion of cannabis seizures compared to the stimulant type drugs may represent an important shift in policing priorities in response to an increase use of these other types of drugs.

Quarterly overview

It is difficult to identify a consistent pattern in quarterly seizures over the three years from 1998 to 2000. There was an average of just over 5,300 seizures per quarter, with the greatest number of seizures occurring in the March quarter 2000 when there was a total of 6,764 seizures (Table 2, page 4).

A breakdown of seizures by type of offence is presented in Figure 9 (page 4) which shows that the greatest number

of offences relate to the possession/use of drugs. Over the 12 quarters there has been similar numbers of seizures for both sell/supply and cultivate offences.

However there may be an influence of seasonality in short term jumps in the number of cultivation offences, with peaks occurring in the hottest time of the year as follows:

- March quarter 1998 (1,240 offences);
- March quarter 1999 (1,451 offences);
- December quarter 1999 (1,041 offences); and
- March quarter 2000 (1,049 offences).

Figure 5: Number of ecstasy seizures

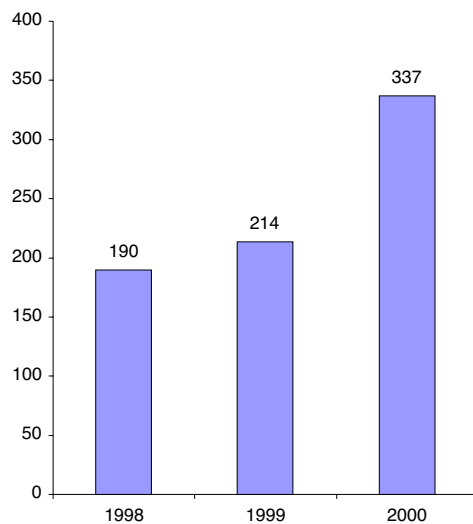


Figure 6: Number of cocaine seizures

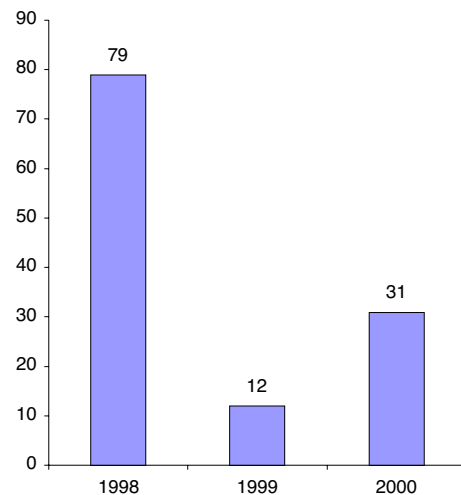


Figure 7: Number of LSD seizures

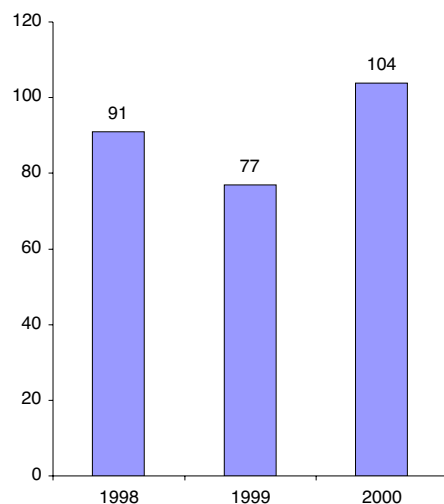


Figure 8: Number of methylamphetamine seizures

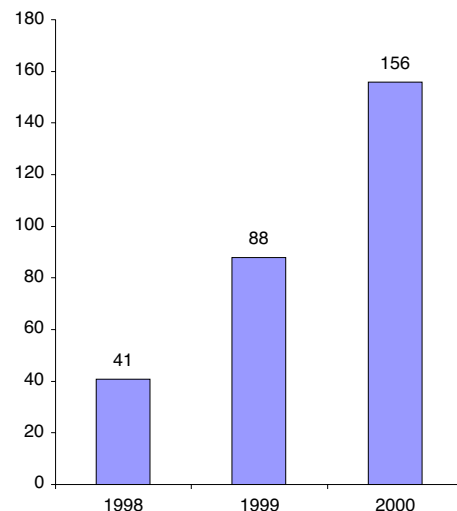


Table 2: Quarterly seizures by type of offence, WA, 1998-2000

	98 Q1	98 Q2	98 Q3	98 Q4	99 Q1	99 Q2	99 Q3	99 Q4	00 Q1	00 Q2	00 Q3	00 Q4
Possess/use	3,168	4,205	3,283	3,060	3,644	3,853	3,538	3,339	3,585	4,000	4,054	3,528
Sell/supply	555	793	570	456	674	767	582	575	867	749	805	583
Cultivate	1,240	987	690	833	1,451	851	703	1,041	1,049	763	782	693
Manufacture	5	4	13	100	2	2	75	15	1,263	88	175	70
All offences	4,968	5,989	4,556	4,449	5,771	5,473	4,898	4,970	6,764	5,600	5,816	4,874

Figure 9: Quarterly seizures by type of offence, 1998-2000

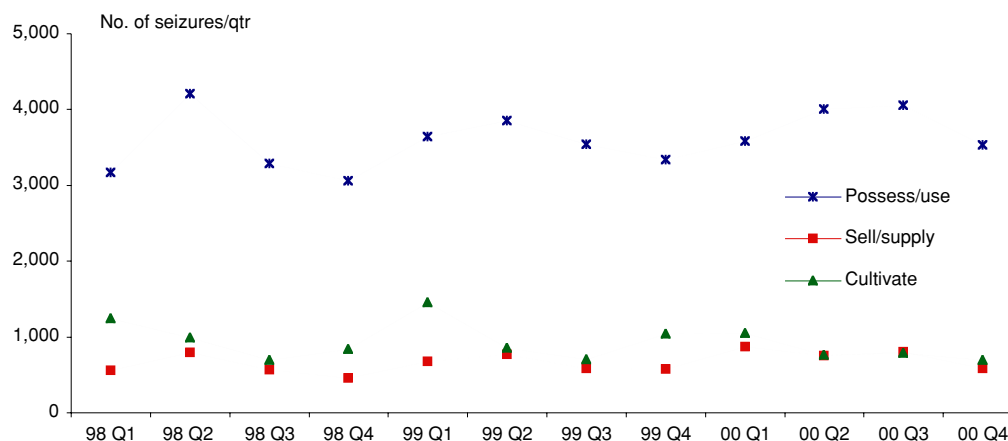


Table 3: Annual seizures by type of drug, possession/use, WA, 1998-2000

	1998		1999		2000	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Amphetamine	705	5.1%	984	6.8%	1,493	9.8%
Cannabis	11,456	83.5%	11,762	81.8%	11,646	76.8%
Cocaine	45	0.3%	8	0.1%	14	0.1%
Dexamphetamine	40	0.3%	70	0.5%	97	0.6%
Ecstasy	111	0.8%	132	0.9%	205	1.4%
Heroin	623	4.5%	569	4.0%	514	3.4%
LSD	60	0.4%	55	0.4%	83	0.5%
Methylamphetamine	31	0.2%	66	0.5%	109	0.7%
Morphine	22	0.2%	34	0.2%	22	0.1%
Opium	2	0.0%	23	0.2%	9	0.1%
Other Specified	203	1.5%	188	1.3%	238	1.6%
Unknown Powder	418	3.1%	483	3.4%	737	4.9%
Total	13,716	100.0%	14,374	100.0%	15,167	100.0%

Possession/use offences

A breakdown of possession/use type offences by type of drug is presented in Table 3 (page 4). This shows that the majority of seizures were related to cannabis in each of the three years.

There were similar total number of seizures in each year, with 11,456 seizures in 1998, 11,762 seizures in 1999 and 11,646 seizures in 2000.

However, the proportion of cannabis seizures involving possession/use charges decreased by 8.0%, from 83.5% of all seizures in 1998 to 76.8% of all seizures in 2000.

Over the three year period the number of amphetamine seizures doubled from 705 seizures (5.1%) in 1998 to 1,493 seizures (9.8%) in 2000. However, the number of heroin seizures declined from 623 seizures (4.5%) in 1998 to 514 seizures (3.4%) in 2000.

Table 4: Annual seizures by type of drug, sell/supply, WA, 1998-2000

	1998		1999		2000	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Amphetamine	211	8.9%	317	12.2%	480	16.0%
Cannabis	1,632	68.7%	1,740	67.0%	1,871	62.3%
Cocaine	32	1.3%	4	0.2%	17	0.6%
Dexamphetamine	10	0.4%	16	0.6%	13	0.4%
Ecstasy	74	3.1%	75	2.9%	126	4.2%
Heroin	222	9.4%	236	9.1%	137	4.6%
LSD	30	1.3%	16	0.6%	19	0.6%
Methylamphetamine	6	0.3%	22	0.8%	42	1.4%
Morphine	3	0.1%	6	0.2%	2	0.1%
Opium	1	-	6	0.2%	1	-
Other Specified	4	1.9%	51	2.0%	32	1.1%
Unknown Powder	109	4.6%	109	4.2%	264	8.8%
Total	2,374	100.0%	2,598	100.0%	3,004	100.0%

Table 5: Quarterly seizures by type of drug, WA, 1998-2000

	98 Q1	98 Q2	98 Q3	98 Q4	99 Q1	99 Q2	99 Q3	99 Q4	00 Q1	00 Q2	00 Q3	00 Q4
Amphetamine	161	281	255	322	365	388	367	240	435	436	667	478
Cannabis	4330	5029	3792	3647	4893	4454	3958	4162	4287	4473	4361	3625
Cocaine	11	24	24	20	1	2	3	6	3	2	5	21
Dexamphetamine	5	13	21	13	19	22	23	24	26	22	37	26
Ecstasy	21	68	27	74	73	64	38	39	88	51	73	125
Heroin	218	238	233	163	216	216	204	172	172	184	160	145
LSD	22	25	20	24	20	17	11	29	37	35	16	16
Methylamphetamine	10	10	5	16	11	32	18	27	35	24	38	59
Morphine	7	8	7	5	2	11	16	11	10	4	4	7
Opium	6	0	0	5	2	0	0	41	9	1	0	4
Other Specified	65	100	46	40	66	80	49	60	137	58	74	110
Unknown Powder	112	193	126	120	103	187	211	159	1525	310	381	258
All offences	4968	5989	4556	4449	5771	5473	4898	4970	6764	5600	5816	4874

Sell/supply offences

A breakdown of sell/supply type offences by type of drug is presented in Table 4 (page 5). These offences represent the more serious charges and typically involved possession of significant quantities of drugs (possession with intent to sell or supply).

Over the three year period the number of amphetamine seizures more than doubled, from 211 seizures (8.9%) in 1998 to 480 seizures (16.0%) in 2000. The number of both heroin and cannabis seizures declined, with heroin dropping from 9.4% in 1998 to 4.6% in 2000 and cannabis from 68.7% in 1998 to 62% in 2000.

Specific drugs

More detailed information about trends in quarterly seizures for each of the major drug groups is contained in Table 5 and in Figures 10 to 18 (pages 6 to 8). As has been indicated earlier there has been a small decline

in the number of cannabis seizures each quarter since early 1999.

These profiles also show that over the three years from 1998 to 2000 drug law enforcement in this State was especially successful in targeting amphetamines (Figure 11), dexamphetamine (Figure 13) and methylamphetamine (Figure 16) as there were marked increases in the number of seizures involving each of these drugs.

Patterns in the number of seizures in relation to heroin (which declined) and ecstasy (which increased) is shown in Figures 12 and 14 respectively.

It is difficult to identify any trends in seizures in relation to LSD, morphine or cocaine and it is possible that this reflects short term fluctuations in the markets for these drugs.

Figure 10: Quarterly cannabis seizures 1998-2000

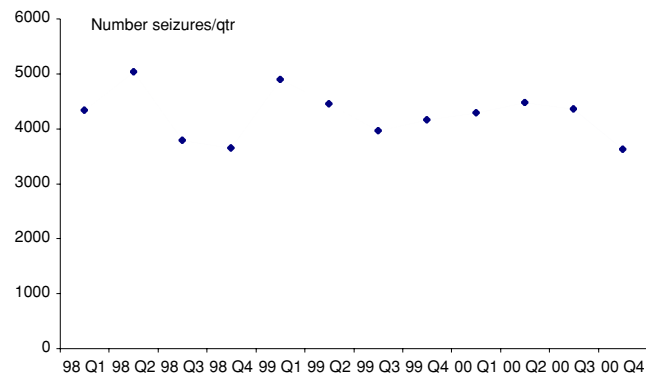


Figure 11: Quarterly amphetamine seizures, 1998-2000

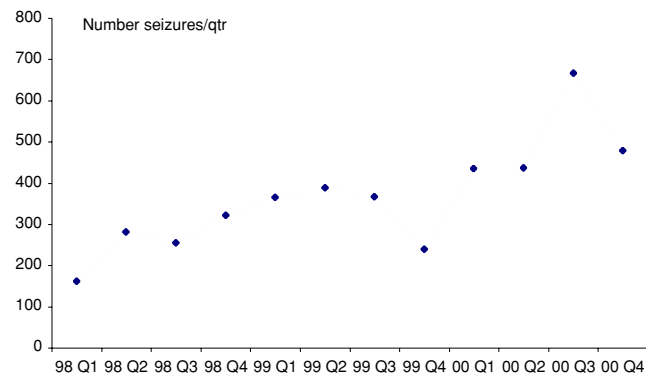


Figure 12: Quarterly heroin seizures, 1998-2000

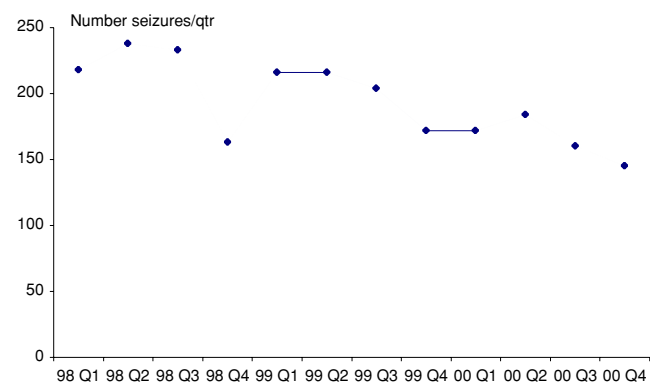


Figure 13: Quarterly dexamphetamine seizures, 1998-2000

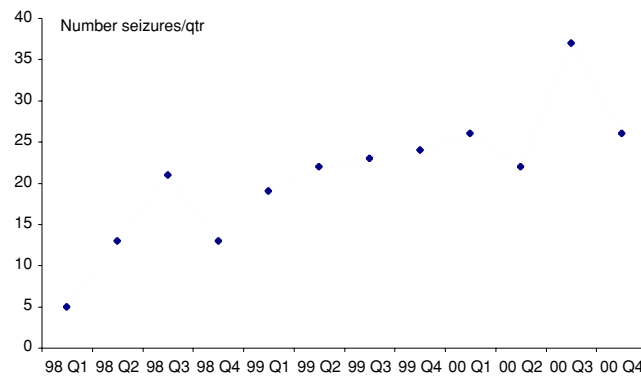


Figure 14: Quarterly ecstasy seizures, 1998-2000

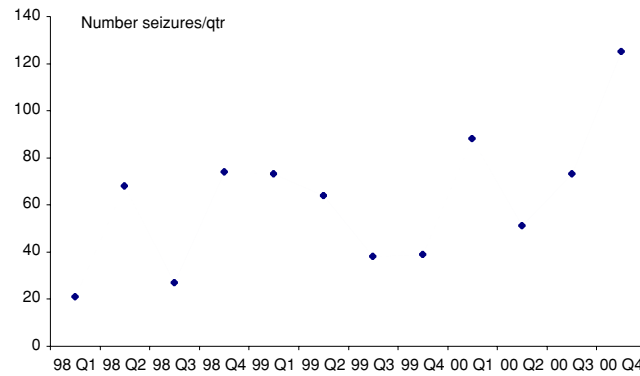


Figure 15: Quarterly LSD seizures, 1998-2000

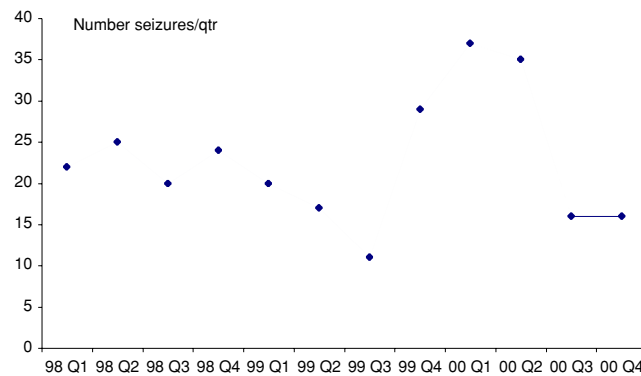


Figure 16: Quarterly methylamphetamine seizures, 1998-2000

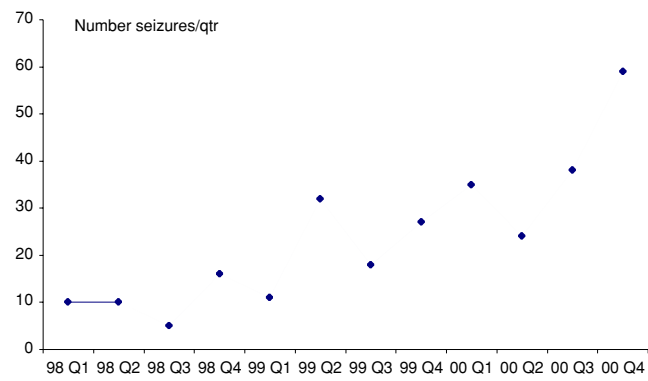


Figure 17: Quarterly morphine seizures, 1998-2000

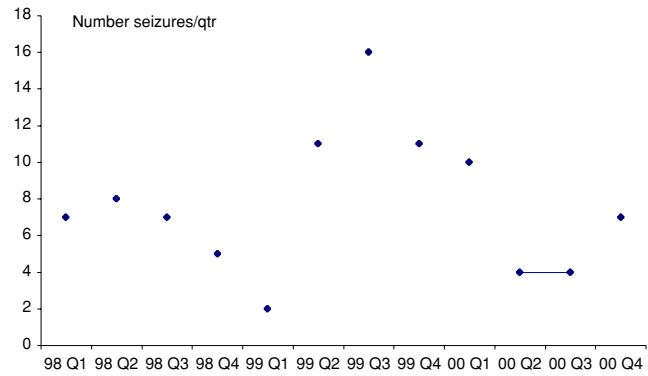


Figure 18: Quarterly cocaine seizures, 1998-2000

