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## What the numbers say

Do liberal drug laws encourage abuse? In the case of the Netherlands, it appears not.

A national drug-use survey currently being assembled, the first of its kind in the Netherlands, is expected to conclude that about 14 per cent of Dutch citizens 12 and over have used cannabis.

Previous estimates have been much higher. But these are now thought to have been badly skewed by the heavy concentration of young adults, artists and other free thinkers in Amsterdam, where about 30 per cent of teen and adult residents admit to having smoked pot at some time.

That 14-per-cent figure compares with a slightly differently based Canadian statistic of 23 per cent, drawn from 1994 surveys of residents 15 or older by Ontario's Addiction Research Foundation and Ottawa's Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

But the Canadian numbers are probably higher now.

After years of decline, recreational cannabis useage among teen-aged students in Ontario has more than doubled. In 1991, 12 per

cent admitted using the drug at least once in the previous year, while the 1997 figure was 25 per cent.

A similar surge was seen elsewhere, notably the United States and the United Kingdom.

As for hard drugs, the Netherlands has a rate of 1.6 heroin and cocaine addicts per 1,000 population – unchanged for more than a decade. That compares to a figure of about three in Britain, seven in Switzerland and 10 in the United States.

A Canadian statistic is elusive: Both Health Minister Allan Rock's office and Health Canada say they do not know how many Canadians regularly abuse heroin and cocaine.

Using CCSA data, an estimate of about two per 1,000 emerges. The CCSA cautions, however, that because the methodology is based on telephone interviews, the real figure may be much higher. Two years ago, Maclean's magazine cited a figure of seven addicts per 1,000 population.

– *Staff*

The article EM9801 reprinted above is used in Figure 8.2 of the STAT 220 Course Materials, in Chapter 1 of the STAT 231 Course Materials and in Figure 2.2a of the STAT 332 Course Materials.