

Section 2.—Births*

The Canadian birth rate in 1921 was 29 per 1,000 population. As a rate of 35 is very high for countries of modern western civilization, the Canadian rate had probably not fallen far, nor for long, before 1921. It fell continuously until 1937 when it reached a low of 20, but as a result of economic recovery and the War, it rose to 22 in 1940, 24 in 1943 and a record high of 28.9 in 1947. Since then the rate has fluctuated moderately between just over 27 in 1950 and 1951 and 28.5 in 1954. The 1956 figure was 28.0.

The birth rates in most provinces followed similar trends but there were some regional differences in the birth rate pattern in recent years. Although all provinces had record high rates immediately following World War II, average birth rates in Ontario and the western provinces were higher during 1951-55 than those for the 1946-50 period, while those for Quebec and the Maritimes were lower. In fact, Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta had all-time record high crude birth rates during the three years 1954 to 1956.

It has always been assumed that the Province of Quebec has had the highest birth rate in Canada, but Table 1 shows that since the late 1930's or early 1940's Newfoundland and New Brunswick have had higher births rates than Quebec. In 1956, Newfoundland had a crude rate of 35.0, followed by Alberta with a rate of 31.1, New Brunswick 29.9 and Quebec 29.4; Manitoba and British Columbia had the lowest rates with 25.8 and 25.9 respectively. However these crude rates are based on total population and therefore do not reflect the fertility of the women who are of reproductive age in the different provinces. A more accurate measure of fertility is the rate based on the number of married women in the population in the reproductive age group, 15 to 49. The following figures, based on the 1956 Census and births in 1956 give the birth rates per 1,000 married women in the age group 15 to 49 by province:—

Newfoundland.....	242	Ontario.....	146	Yukon.....	199
Prince Edward Island....	186	Manitoba.....	148	N.W.T.....	261
Nova Scotia.....	167	Saskatchewan.....	163		
New Brunswick.....	197	Alberta.....	172	CANADA.....	164
Quebec.....	188	British Columbia.....	141		

On this basis if we exclude the Yukon and Northwest Territories†, Newfoundland still had the highest fertility rate followed by New Brunswick and Quebec, and British Columbia had the lowest.

Also, contrary to popular impression, since 1953 more babies were born each year in Ontario than in the Province of Quebec; in 1956, 143,516 babies were born to Ontario mothers as compared with 135,884 to Quebec mothers. A record total of 450,739 were born to Canadian mothers in 1956, 7,802 more than in the previous year.

Sex of Live Births.—Wherever birth statistics have been collected they have shown an excess of male over female births. No conclusive explanation of this excess has yet been given. Nevertheless it is so much of an accepted statistical fact that a proper ratio of male to female births has become one of the criteria of complete registration. The number of males to every 1,000 females born in Canada in 1941-54 varied between 1,052 and 1,067. In 1956 there were 1,058 males born for every 1,000 females. Variations in the provincial sex ratios result from chance variation because of the relatively small number of births involved—the smaller the total number of births, the greater the chance of wide sex-ratio variations from year to year.

* For international comparisons see Section 7, pp. 230-231.

† Most of the population of these areas, particularly the Northwest Territories, is made up of Indians and Eskimos whose fertility rate is considerably higher than that of white women.