

Subsection 3.—Maternal Mortality

As indicated in Table 1, pp. 196-198, the number of mothers who die in pregnancy and childbirth has been greatly reduced during the past two decades. Although the number of births has been much greater in recent years, the number of maternal deaths has declined steadily since about 1930 (when there were 1,215 deaths and a rate of almost five deaths for every 1,000 live births) to a record low of 278 in 1956. Since 1945 the rate of maternal mortality has dropped below two per 1,000 live births and has been under one per 1,000 live births since 1951. Mortality among unmarried mothers is higher than among married mothers.

Age at Death.—Table 17 shows the distribution of maternal deaths by age groups and average age at death. The latter is about four years higher than the average age of all mothers at the time of childbirth. The rates per 1,000 live births by age groups show that age is a most important factor in maternal mortality. Though all the rates have shown a declining tendency, the inequalities between the age groups remain. The death rate for mothers 30-34 years of age is twice to three times as high as the rate at 20-24 years, and at 40-44 years it is five to ten times as high. The higher rate for the "under 20" age group, compared with the age group 20-24, is caused by the high proportion of illegitimate children born to young mothers in the "under 20" group.

17.—Maternal Mortality and Rates per 1,000 Live Births by Age Group 1954-56

Age Group	Maternal Deaths						Rates per 1,000 Live Births		
	1954 ¹		1955 ¹		1956 ²		1954 ¹	1955 ¹	1956 ²
	No.	p.c.	No.	p.c.	No.	p.c.			
Under 20 years.....	11	3.8	13	4.2	12	4.7	0.38	0.44	0.38
20 — 24 "	37	12.8	47	15.4	29	11.4	0.32	0.40	0.24
25 — 29 "	68	23.4	62	20.3	59	23.1	0.55	0.50	0.46
30 — 34 "	66	22.8	76	24.8	59	23.1	0.74	0.85	0.65
35 — 39 "	69	23.8	74	24.2	56	22.1	1.49	1.54	1.14
40 — 44 "	33	11.4	29	9.5	38	14.9	2.21	1.89	2.51
45 — 49 "	6	2.0	4	1.3	2	0.8	5.09	3.54	1.73
50 years or over.....	—	—	1	0.3	—	—	—	—	—
Totals, All Ages.....	290	100.0	306	100.0	255	100.0	0.69	0.72	0.58
Average age at death	32.2		31.8		32.3	

¹ Excludes Newfoundland and the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

² Excludes Newfoundland.

Causes of Maternal Deaths.—Table 18 shows the number and rate of maternal deaths by causes. Until a decade ago puerperal sepsis and toxæmias of pregnancy were by far the most important causes. Since 1936 the rate for puerperal sepsis has been reduced by almost 95 p.c. largely as a result of the use of sulpham and other antibiotics. Although there has been a reduction of over 70 p.c. since 1936 in the maternal death rate from toxæmias of pregnancy this group still remains a major cause of maternal deaths second only to complications of delivery.