

The general trend in the birth rate since 1921 is shown in the chart on p. 227. The annual rates declined gradually but steadily from 29.3 in 1921 to a record low of 20.1 in 1937, recovered sharply in the late 1930's and during World War II to 24.3 in 1945 and in the two years following the War rose to a postwar high of 28.9 in 1947. Between 1948 and 1959 the rate remained remarkably stable at between 27.1 and 28.5 but in 1960 it dropped to 26.8 and in 1961 to 26.1, a postwar low.

The rates in most provinces followed trends very similar to the national trend but showed some regional differences 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 the 1951-55 period than during 1946-50 while those for Quebec and the Maritimes were lower than during 1946-50. In fact, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia had record high crude birth rates during the 1956-59 period. However, all provinces have had declining or stationary rates since about 1959-60.

It is often erroneously assumed that the Province of Quebec has not only the largest number of births annually but the highest birth rate in Canada. Since the late 1930's or early 1940's Newfoundland, in some years New Brunswick and, since 1953, Alberta have had higher birth rates than Quebec. Table 1, pp. 220-221, shows that five provinces—Newfoundland, Alberta, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia in that order—had higher crude rates than Quebec in 1961, followed by Saskatchewan, Ontario and Manitoba, and British Columbia.

It should be noted, however, that since these crude rates are based on the total population they do not reflect the fertility of the women of reproductive age in the different provinces or the number married within these reproductive ages. A more accurate measure of the true birth rate is one based on the number of married women between the ages of 15 and 44 (see pp. 231-234).

Also contrary to popular impression, since 1953 more babies were born each year in Ontario than in the Province of Quebec; in 1961, 157,663 babies were born to Ontario mothers as compared with 137,174 to Quebec mothers. Altogether, 475,700 children were born in Canada in 1961, 3,575 fewer than the record 479,275 born in 1959 and 2,851 fewer than the number born during 1960.

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 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 has averaged around 1,057 since the middle 1930's. Provincial sex ratios vary much more widely 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. Another commonly acknowledged fact in many countries—although there is no generally accepted explanation for it—is that the male ratio appears to rise during or shortly after major wars. This seems to have happened in Canada between 1942 and 1945 when the ratio rose to an average of 1,064 during these four years as compared with averages of 1,054 between 1931-41 and 1,057 since 1946.