

accurate measure of the true birth rate is one based on the number of women between the ages of 15 and 45 (see Table 5.41 and Section 5.6.2).

Also contrary to popular impression, since 1953 more babies were born each year in Ontario than in Quebec; for example, in 1971, 130,395 babies were born to Ontario mothers as compared with 89,210 to Quebec mothers. Altogether, 362,187 children were born alive in Canada in 1971, 117,088 or 25% fewer than the record 479,275 born in 1959. Despite an increase since 1966 in the number of women of reproductive age and the annual number of marriages, the number of births has fluctuated between 388,000 and 362,000 during this period.

**Sex of live births.** With rare exceptions, 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 1930s. 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. In 1971, 1,063 male infants were born for every 1,000 females.

**Hospitalized births.** In 1971, 99.6% of all Canadian births occurred in hospital as compared with 96.9% ten years previously, and 79.1% twenty years ago. Before the initiation in 1958 of the federal-provincial hospital insurance programs – in which all provinces were participating by 1961 – there were rather wide variations among the provinces in percentages of hospitalized births. Such variations were caused by the existence of prepaid or provincially sponsored hospital, maternity or medical care plans in some provinces, the unavailability of hospital facilities in others – particularly in remote rural areas – and preference for home delivery in some local areas. Little variation now exists and Table 5.33 shows that only in the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories do the percentages fall below 90.0%; in the Yukon Territory it was 86.0% in 1971, and in the Northwest Territories 88.6%.

**Illegitimacy.** In 1971 9.0% of the live births in Canada were “illegitimate” (i.e., births in which the parents reported themselves as not being married to each other at the time of the child's birth or registration, and in Ontario to those in which the mother was reported as “single”). This percentage is low compared with that of many countries of the world but has been rising recently, as shown in Table 5.34. In some provinces the percentages of illegitimate births have more than doubled during the past 20 years. It should be noted that the increase in the proportion of the illegitimate births is attributable to two factors: first, the relative increase in the proportion of women aged 15-24 (the female population of child-bearing age where the probability of having an illegitimate birth is the highest); and second, since legitimate fertility has declined sharply in recent years, the relative weight of the illegitimate fertility has increased.

**Multiple births.** Approximately 1% of confinements result in multiple births, and 99% of the multiple births are twins. One out of about 10,000 confinements results in triplets. Two sets of quadruplets were born in 1960 and one set in each of 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1968 and two sets in 1969.

**Age of parents.** Age of parents is an important variable in any analysis of birth statistics. The distribution of legitimate and illegitimate infants born in 1971 by age of the parents is given in Table 5.35. This Table shows that over two thirds of the births in 1971 to married mothers were among 20-29-year-olds, another 15% to 30-34-year-olds and about 8% under 20. Almost 46% of the illegitimate births were to unmarried mothers under 20 and an additional 34% among 20-24-year-olds.

It should be kept in mind that the higher proportion of births occurring at younger ages in recent years does not necessarily mean that couples are having their children at a younger age. Two things should be noted: first, the decline in fertility in recent years has been greatest among older women and, consequently, births occurring at younger ages automatically form a greater proportion of total births than formerly, as well as produce a lower average age at birth; secondly, this effect is compounded by the growing proportion of women in early child-bearing ages where fertility is higher or, more accurately, has declined less than among older women.