

Table 5.41 indicates that in 1971, considering all women whether married or not, women in their 20s were the most reproductive, as might be expected; on the average, for every 1,000 women between the ages of 20 and 25, 135 infants were born during that year or, expressed another way, about one woman out of seven in that age group gave birth to a live-born infant. For the third consecutive year, women in the age group 25-29 had a higher rate (142) than those in their early 20s.

Another measure of fertility in a country is obtainable from what is conventionally referred to as a gross reproduction rate. The gross reproduction rates shown in Table 5.41 indicate the average number of female children born each year to each woman living through the child-bearing ages. In other words, the gross reproduction rate represents the average number of females that would be born to each woman who lived to age 50 if the fertility rate of the given year remained unchanged during the whole of her child-bearing period. A rate of 1.000 indicates that, on the basis of current fertility and without making any allowance for mortality among mothers during their child-bearing years, the present generation of child-bearing women would exactly maintain itself.

Canada has always had one of the highest gross reproduction rates among the industrialized countries of the world. Even during the period of low birth rates in the 1930s the rate varied between 1.300 and 1.500 and since World War II has ranged from 1.640 to a record high of 1.915 in 1959. However, since 1959, and particularly since 1964, the national gross reproduction rate has dropped rather dramatically from 1.788 to 1.061 in 1971 — slightly above the number required for the population to replace itself. Provincial and territorial rates have, on the whole but with some exceptions, followed the same pattern as the national average. Among the provinces, Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario, in that order, had the lowest gross reproduction rates in 1971, with Quebec below the replacement level.

5.6.3 Natural increase

The excess of births over deaths, commonly referred to as "natural increase", is a very important factor in the growth of a population. Although the collection of Canadian birth and death statistics began only in 1921, some idea of the rate of natural increase in the early years back to the mid-1800s may be learned from the estimates of births and deaths shown at the beginning of Sections 5.6.1 and 5.7.1, which result in the following natural increase rates (per 1,000 population): 1851-61, 23; 1861-71, 19; 1871-81, 18; 1881-91, 16; 1891-1901, 14; 1901-11, 18; 1911-21, 16.

The estimates of natural increase in the late 1800s and early 1900s reflect a combination of high birth rates and declining death rates. During the 1920s and early 1930s the birth rate declined more than the death rate and the natural increase rate dropped to a record low of 9.7 in 1937. But higher birth rates during and after World War II and a continued declining death rate caused the natural increase rate to rise steadily from 10.9 in 1939 to a record 20.3 in 1954. After that year there was a steady drop because of declining birth rates and the natural increase rate fell for the first time below ten in 1971 at 9.5. Table 5.31 gives average rates of natural increase in the provinces for five-year periods 1951-65 and for single years 1966-71.

5.7 Mortality

The death rate in Canada is one of the lowest in the world (7.3 per 1,000 population in 1971). After a continuous gradual decline over the past hundred years or more, the rate appears now to have almost levelled off. It seems that Canada, like other industrialized nations, has virtually completed the demographic transition in the mortality component of population change. Any further reduction in the death rate is likely to be very small, and to affect primarily persons in the older ages. Canadian mortality experience in general, as well as in relation to infant and maternal deaths, is discussed in this Section, followed by measurements of life expectancy compiled from recent death rates.

5.7.1 General mortality

No official crude death rates (i.e., rates per 1,000 total population) are available prior to 1921. However, some indication of these may be obtained from studies of the early censuses which have resulted in the following estimates of annual crude death rates for specified intercensal periods: 1851-61, 22; 1861-71, 21; 1871-81, 19; 1881-91, 18; 1891-1901, 16; 1901-11, 13; 1911-21, 13.