



4.6.2 Fertility rates

The sex and age composition of a population is a fundamental factor affecting its birth rates. Since almost all children born each year are to women between the ages of 15 and 45, variations in the proportion of women of these ages to the total population will cause variations in the crude birth rate of different countries, or of different regions within a country, even though the actual rates of reproduction or fertility of the women in these age groups are identical. It is therefore conventional practice to calculate what are termed age-specific fertility rates, i.e. the number of infants born annually to every 1,000 women in each of the reproductive age groups.

As might be expected, Table 4.39 indicates that women in their 20s are the most reproductive. On the average, for every 1,000 women between the ages of 20 and 25, 120 infants were born during 1972. Expressed another way, about one woman out of eight in that age group gave birth to a live-born infant. For the fourth consecutive year, women in the age group 25-29 had a higher rate (137) than those in their early 20s.

Another measure of fertility is obtainable from what is conventionally referred to as a gross reproduction rate. The gross reproduction rates shown in Table 4.39 indicate the average number of female children born 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