

rates have become far more stable and it is the birth and fertility rates that will continue to be the dominant factor in the foreseeable future in shaping the demographic structure of Canada (see Section 4.1).

4.6.1 Births

No accurate figures on Canadian crude birth rates are available prior to 1921, when the annual collection of official national figures was initiated. However, the following rough estimates of the average annual crude rates of live births (i.e. per 1,000 total population) for each 10-year intercensal period between 1851 and 1921 may be inferred from studies of early Canadian census data: 1851-61, 45; 1861-71, 40; 1871-81, 37; 1881-91, 34; 1891-1901, 30; 1901-11, 31; 1911-21, 29.

The general trend in the national crude birth rate since 1951 is shown in Table 4.32. 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 1930s and during World War II to 24.3 in 1945. Following the war the birth rate rose to a high of 28.9 in 1947. Between 1948 and 1959 the rate remained remarkably stable at between 27.1 and 28.5, but has since declined dramatically to reach a record low of 15.5 by 1973.

The rates for most provinces as shown in Table 4.32 followed trends very similar to the national trend but exhibited some regional differences in recent years. Although all provinces had record high rates immediately following World War II, during the 1951-55 period average birth rates in Ontario and the western provinces were higher than during 1946-50 and those for Quebec and the Maritime provinces were lower. In fact, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia had record high crude birth rates during the 1956-60 period. By 1973 all provinces had record low rates.

Since these crude birth rates are based on the total population they do not reflect the true fertility of the women of reproductive ages in the different provinces. A more accurate measure of the true birth rate is one based on the number of women between the ages of 15 and 45 (see Table 4.40 and Section 4.6.2).

Sex of live births. With rare exceptions, wherever birth statistics have been collected they have shown an excess of male over female births. 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 fewer 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 1973, 1,061 male infants were born in Canada for every 1,000 females.

Age of parents. The distribution of legitimate live-born infants born in 1973 by age of the parents is given in Table 4.34, as well as of illegitimate infants by age of mother. This Table shows that 70% of the births in 1973 to married mothers were among 20-29-year-olds, another 15% to 30-34-year-olds, and only about 8.6% of births were to married mothers under 20. By contrast, 47% of the illegitimate births were to unmarried mothers under 20, and an additional 31% to 20-24-year-olds.

Order of birth. Table 4.35 shows the order of birth of all live-born infants in 1973 according to the age of the mother. As would be expected, 32,968 or five out of every six of the 39,518 infants born to mothers 15-19 years of age were the first live-born child, whereas nearly half of the children born to mothers of 20-24 years were their second or later live-born child. In 1973, 334 infants were born to mothers who had not yet reached their 15th birthday.

Table 4.36 summarizes the pattern of family formation since 1951 and shows that the percentages of first and second children have been increasing in recent years. This has been accompanied by a reduction in the proportion of third and higher birth orders.

Illegitimacy. Concurrent with the declining birth rate, the proportion of the live births in Canada which 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, and in Ontario those in which the mother was reported as "single" at the time of birth) rose to 9% in 1973, remaining unchanged for the last three years (see Table 4.37). In 1956 illegitimate births constituted about 4% of all live births. In the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories, roughly one of