

every four births in 1973 was considered as illegitimate. Of the provinces, Saskatchewan and Manitoba had the highest percentages at 15.4 and 13.4, respectively.

Stillbirths. The 2,866 stillbirths of at least 28 weeks gestation that were delivered in 1973 represented a ratio of a little over eight for every 1,000 fetuses born alive. As is evident from Table 4.38, the stillbirth ratio has been decreasing steadily and has been cut by more than half over the past quarter-century. Ratios in some provinces have been reduced more than in others. The stillbirth ratio among unmarried mothers has been consistently higher than that among married mothers.

Table 4.39 illustrates the fact that the risk of having a stillborn child increases with the age of the mother. Although stillbirth rates for mothers of all ages have been declining, they continue to be much higher for older mothers than for younger ones.

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 4.40 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, 118 infants were born during 1973. 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 (132) 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 4.40 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 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 in 1946 to a high of 1.915 in 1959. However, since 1959, and particularly since 1964, the national gross reproduction rate has dropped sharply from 1.788 to 0.937 in 1973 — appreciably below the replacement level of 1.000 for the first time in Canada's history. Among the provinces, Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario in that order, had the lowest gross reproduction rates in 1973, all below the replacement level.

4.6.3 Natural increase

The excess of births over deaths, commonly referred to as "natural increase" has been the main factor in the growth of Canada's 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 obtained from the estimates of births and deaths shown at the beginning of Sections 4.6.1 and 4.7.1, which produce 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.

During the 1920s and early 1930s the birth rate declined much more rapidly than the death rate and the natural increase rate dropped to a record low of 9.7 in 1937. 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 due to declining birth rates and the natural increase rate fell below 10 for the