

growing proportions of persons over 65. Young children formed 14.7% of the total population in 1961; by 1976 their proportion had declined to 9.2%. During the same period, the proportion of elderly persons increased from 7.6% to 8.7%; in fact, the population over 65 has increased by 43.9% over the 15-year period, while the population in general increased by only 26.1%. This trend was emphasized in the five years 1971 to 1976 when the population over 65 increased by 14.8% and the population as a whole rose by 6.6%.

In other words, the proportion of the elderly is increasing and growing faster than the population in general. In 1901 only five people in every 100 were over 65. By 1976 the proportion had increased to almost nine in 100. The population over 65 in 1976 was seven times larger than in 1901, while population in general was only four times larger.

There are three main causes for these changes. Birth rates declined from about 30 per 1,000 in the early 1900s to a low of 15.5 per 1,000 in 1977. The age level of thousands of immigrants who arrived earlier in the century (2.6 million between 1911 and 1931) is now over 65. Life expectancy has been increasing (from an average of 61 to about 73 years between 1931 and 1971) due to medical advances and improvement in the overall standard of living.

The adult population (generally regarded as 15-64 years) increased substantially, with a gain of 1,651,000 or 12.3% in the 1971-76 period. This group comprised 65.6% of the total population in 1976 compared with 62.3% in 1971 and 59.4% in 1966.

The growth of the junior working ages (20-34) is of particular significance in the context of Canada's employment situation. In 1976 the count for this population group was 5,754,000, compared with 4,779,000 in 1971, a 20.4% increase. Furthermore, of the total 1971-76 population increase of 1,424,000 persons, the increase in the junior working ages accounts for as much as 68.5%. This group in 1976 corresponds mainly to the children born in the high-birth-rate years following World War II.

Marital status. The marital status composition of the 1976 population of Canada indicates increasing proportions of persons married (1976, 47.7%; 1971, 45.3%) and divorced (1976, 1.3%; 1971, 0.8%); a decreasing proportion of persons never married (1976, 46.4%; 1971, 49.5%); and a fairly stable proportion of persons widowed (1976, 4.5%; 1971, 4.4%). Generally, these trends also apply to each sex separately.

The most dramatic change concerns Canada's divorced population which increased from 175,100 in 1971 to 302,500 in 1976 (a 73% increase); divorced females increased from 100,800 in 1971 to 183,500 in 1976 (an 82% increase). This trend, the beginning of which was observed in 1971, reflects the more liberal divorce laws of 1968 as well as a change in the social acceptability of divorce.

The overwhelming number of widows, (853,900 or 82%) compared to widowers (189,700 or 18%) is a consequence mainly of higher age-specific rates of both mortality and remarriage among males than among females.

Analyses of marital status composition are most instructive when conducted in conjunction with sex and age. Two major findings follow. The years 1971-76 saw a decline in the proportion of married persons in the age range 25-34 and a corresponding increase in the proportion of single persons in that age range. (Data by quinquennial age group confirm this finding for virtually the entire young adult population.) The implication is that the 1971-76 increase in the proportion married in the population as a whole (as noted above) is a consequence of the changing age structure, rather than of a tendency to marry at a younger age. The same applies to the 1971-76 decrease in the proportion single in the population as a whole.

In connection with the recent decline in birth rates, the percentages of married women in the prime child-bearing ages 20-39 are: 1976, 11.6%; 1971, 10.6% and 1966, 10.2%. (Table 4.15 reports the figures for the age group 25-34, which show a similar trend.) That birth rates have been declining even though the population in the prime child-bearing group has increased further emphasizes the drop in birth rates.

4.3.2 Language

In the 1976 Census, a question on language asked for mother tongue, the language first spoken in childhood and still understood, with spaces to mark English, French,