

figures by five-year periods back to 1951-55. Table 4.33 shows similar data for urban centres of 50,000 population and over for 1976 and 1977 with comparative averages for 1971-75. More detailed information on vital statistics, including analyses of recent trends, is published annually in the Statistics Canada reports *Vital statistics, volume I, births* (Catalogue 84-204), *Vital statistics, volume II, marriages and divorces* (Catalogue 84-205), *Vital statistics, volume III, deaths* (Catalogue 84-206) and *Causes of death, provinces by sex and Canada by sex and age* (Catalogue 84-203). Certain unpublished data are available from Statistics Canada on request.

## Births

### 4.5.1

Of all the demographic factors which produce changes in population (fertility, mortality, nuptiality, immigration, emigration), none exerts greater influence than the rate of reproduction or fertility. By comparison, the nation's mortality, which has reached low levels, could be considered fairly stable; the emerging patterns of births and consequent fertility rates may be expected to continue to be a dominant factor in determining the future demographic consequences for Canada.

**Birth rates.** 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 (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 annual crude birth rates declined steadily from 29.3 in 1921 to a record low of 20.1 in 1937, recovered sharply in the late 1930s and rose during World War II to 24.3 in 1945. Following the war the rate rose to a high of 28.9 in 1947. Between 1948 and 1959 it remained remarkably stable at between 27.1 and 28.5, but has since declined dramatically to a record low of 15.4 by 1974. The rate for 1977 shows a slight decrease to 15.5 from 15.7 in 1976 and the emerging trend seems to be one of further decline. Provincial rates have followed this trend with some regional differences.

Since these crude birth rates are based on the total population they do not reflect the true fertility of the women in reproductive ages. A more accurate measure of fertility is one based on the number of women by age between the ages of 15 and 49 (Table 4.36; Section 4.5.2).

**Age of mothers.** The distribution of infants born alive in 1976 by age of the mother is given in Table 4.34. It shows that 69% of the live births in 1976 to all mothers were among women 20-29, another 14.8% to women 30-34, and only about 10.8% of births were to mothers under 20.

**Order of birth.** Table 4.34 also shows the order of birth of all live-born infants in 1976 according to the age of the mother. In 1976 the first births for mothers of all ages constituted 41.8% of all live births; births of fourth or higher order constituted 7.3%.

**Stillbirths.** The 2,691 stillbirths of at least 28 weeks gestation reported in 1976 represented a ratio of 7.5 for every 1,000 live births (Table 4.35). The stillbirth ratio has been cut by more than half over the past quarter-century. Ratios have been reduced more in some provinces than in others. 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 than for younger mothers.

## Fertility rates

### 4.5.2

The sex and age composition of a population are fundamental factors affecting its birth rates. Since almost all children are born to women between the ages of 15 and 49, variations in the proportion of women in this age group to the total population will cause variations in the crude birth rate of different countries, or of different regions, even though the actual rates of reproduction or fertility of the women are the same. It is therefore an accepted practice for comparison purposes to calculate age-specific fertility rates, the number of infants born annually to every 1,000 women in each of the reproductive age groups.