

1.0 million were classified as farm population; 4.9 million as rural non-farm.

## 2.5 Demographic and social characteristics

### 2.5.1 Age, sex and marital status

The distribution of a population by age, sex and marital status represents the effect of the most fundamental variables of vital trends: births, deaths, marriages and dissolutions of marriages. Social and economic factors, by their effects on vital events and migration, also influence this distribution. An unbroken series of census data is available as far back as the first Census of Canada in 1871; only recent trends are summarized here. Tables 2.13 to 2.16 present further details.

**More females than males.** The 1981 Census showed a continuation of the trend, first recorded in 1976. At that time the sex ratio was 99.2 males for every 100 females. In 1981 it was 98.3 males for 100 females. For those over 65 years of age, the ratio was 74.9 to 100.

Before 1976, with the exception of 1971 when the sex ratio was almost balanced (at 100.2 males per 100 females), all other censuses showed Canada's population as being male dominated. In 1961, for example, the ratio was 102 males for every 100 females. The historical data show that the sex ratios recorded in decennial censuses of 1851 through 1961 fluctuated in the range of 102.2 to 112.9 males for every 100 females.

One factor in the variation in sex ratios has been immigration which has generally been male selective. This was particularly responsible for the upward trend in sex ratios between 1881 and 1911. However, the change in the sex pattern of migration shows increasing female immigrants in recent periods.

**Fewer children, more elderly.** Two of the most striking changes in the structure of Canada's population were a 7% decline in the number of children under 15 years and a 17.9% increase in the number of persons over 65.

From 1976 to 1981 the population aged 14 and under decreased from 5.9 million persons or 25.6% of the total to 5.5 million (22.5%). The number of persons over 65 years grew from about 2 million or 8.7% of the total to about 2.4 million (9.7%).

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 1981 the proportion had increased to nearly 10 in 100.

There are three main causes for these changes. Fertility rates declined from a high point of 3.54 per woman in 1921, to a low of 1.75 in 1980. 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 working population** (20-64 years) increased substantially, with a gain of 1.4 million or 11.3% in the 1976-81 period.

Of special interest in connection with employment and unemployment is the population in the junior working ages (20-34) and the senior working ages (35-64). In 1981 the count for the junior group was almost 6.6 million, up 14% from almost 5.8 million in 1976. In the senior group the corresponding figures are: 1981, about 7.6 million and 1976, almost 7 million, a 9% increase.

**Marital status.** The marital status composition of the 1981 population indicates increasing proportions of persons married (1981, 49.1%; 1976, 47.7%) and divorced (1981, 2.1%; 1976, 1.3%); a decreasing proportion of persons never married (1981, 44.1%; 1976, 46.4%); and a fairly stable proportion of persons widowed (1981, 4.8%; 1976, 4.5%). Generally, these trends also apply to each sex separately.

The most dramatic change concerns Canada's divorced population which increased 65% to 500,100 in 1981 from 302,500 in 1976; divorced males increased from 119,000 in 1976 to 202,800 in 1981 (a 70% increase). The vast majority of the divorced are over 30. The age range 30-49 accounts for more than half the divorced population of each sex.

Among the widowed, the overwhelming number of widows, (958,100 or 83%) compared to widowers (199,500 or 17%) is a consequence mainly of higher age-specific rates of both mortality and remarriage among males than among females. Another significant cause is the fact that women usually marry men who are older than themselves.

Analyses of marital status composition conducted in conjunction with sex and age result in two major findings: a decline of 5% during 1976-81 in the proportion of married persons in the age range 20-29 and a corresponding increase in the proportion of single persons in that age range. (Data by quinquennial age group confirm these findings for virtually the entire young adult population.) The implication is that the 1976-81 increase in the proportion married in the population as a whole is a consequence of the changing age structure, rather than of a tendency to marry at a younger age. The same applies to the 1976-81 decrease in the proportion single in the population as a whole.

In connection with the recent decline in birth rates, the percentages of women in the prime child-bearing ages 20-39 were: 1981, 33.3%; 1976, 30.5%. 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.