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THE WAR AND VITAL STATISTICS IN CANADA

Because the present war follows a period of pronounced economic depression, its immediate effect on Canadian vital statistics has been marked. During the war, employment opportunities and the national income have been high, and even the supply and consumption of food by the civilian population has been greater than in the pre-war period. Hence the effects of the war have chiefly been those associated with a period of prosperity. Canadian marriage and birth rates have reversed their previous downward trend, and in the case of the marriage rate rose in 1942 to the highest point since statistics have been collected. The long-term effect of the war will not be discernible for a number of years and may not be so favourable.

MARRIAGES

Short term changes in the marriage rate often reflect economic conditions so closely that economists regard them as a trade barometer. Immediately upon the declaration of war, an abnormal rise in the marriage rate was apparent in Canada and in many other countries.

An explanation of the terms used in discussing marriage rates is necessary for the proper understanding of the figures presented. The 'crude' marriage rate refers to the number of marriages per 1,000 population at any given period. It does not distinguish between first and later marriages and does not take into account the difference in age and sex distribution of the population, which varies considerably in different provinces in Canada and in different countries. The proportion of marriages at any given time clearly depends very greatly on the age composition of the population. For example a province where the age composition consists of a large proportion of aged will have a much lower marriage rate than a province where the age composition is young, but the marriage probability of a group of women at any specific age in both provinces might be the same.

For this reason, the crude marriage rate may be misleading. A 'true' or 'refined' marriage rate can be arrived at by taking the proportion of women who marry at least once out of a thousand girls alive at 15 years of age at any given time. Since it is only during census years that the exact number of girls of this age is known, the true or refined marriage rate can only be calculated for the census years. The gross nuptiality rate describes the probability of marriage in a group of girls, all of whom live to old age, while the net nuptiality rate takes into account the reduction of the spinster population by deaths as well as by marriages. Such tables are a measure of conditions prevailing only in the specific years to which they refer.

The crude marriage rate shows that between 1926 and 1942, marriages, after dropping sharply in 1930, reached their lowest point in 1932-33 at the depth of the depression. In 1933 and 1934 they started to rise. By 1937 they had regained the level of 1928-29, although there probably still remained a backlog of postponed marriages. With the outbreak of war, the rate rose sharply, and by 1942 had reached an unprecedented level of 10.9 marriages per