

BIRTHS

Because most marriages are followed by a first birth fairly soon and many of these first births by a second, fluctuations in the birth rate follow changes in the marriage rate at an interval of about one year. Of recent years, this correspondence between the two rates has been closer because of the smaller size of families and the much higher proportion of births which is contributed by first and second births. In the 1942 Canada Year Book is a chart which shows the close correspondence between unemployment, marriages and births in Canada during the depression years. Although the birth rate fluctuates for different years, the long-term downward trend is marked.

The first effect of the rising marriage rate during the present war was to arrest the decline in the birth rate. A marked rise in the crude (unadjusted) birth rate was seen in 1940, following the marked rise in the marriage rate by one or two years, and continuing until the peak was reached about the middle of 1943. The preliminary rate for 1943 was 24.0 births per thousand population as compared with 20.5 births per thousand population for the four-year period from 1936 to 1940. However, the rate for the last quarter of 1943 was lower than for the same period in 1942. Returns are incomplete beyond this point, but examination of available registrations suggest that the turning point downward in births came towards the end of 1943, corresponding to the turning point in marriages in 1942.

The gross reproduction rate gives the average number of female children born to a married woman, and is independent of the age composition of the population. As would be expected, the reproduction rate is affected by the marriage rate and in the last few years has followed the same course as the crude birth rate. The correspondence between marriages and subsequent births is best seen in reproduction rates by order of birth, which in Canada are only available for legitimate births (including stillbirths). In the ten years 1931 to 1941, it can be seen that first births follow marriages fairly closely with a lag of about one year. From 1938 on there is a marked rise in the marriage rate and from 1939 on, in the first birth rate. The effect of this rising marriage rate is visible in the number of families with four children, but is an arrest of the downward trend rather than an actual rise. No effect at all is seen in sixth births and later births.

The connection between marriages and subsequent births could be studied more precisely if the length of time the couple had been married was recorded at the time of birth registration. In New Zealand, where this is done, the wartime increase in births has been spectacular. Since more births are occurring to older women, it would appear that a large number of them were postponed during the depression. The wartime rise has been mainly in first and second births with the rise greatest in marriages of three years or more duration. Up to the end of 1941, the effects of the worst years of the depression had been wiped out, and current fertility was probably about equal to what it was in 1932. An arrest of the downward trend was seen up to fourth births, as in Canada, but families with more than four children have continued to decrease. While the duration of marriage in relation to births is not known in Canada, a recent estimate of the relation of births to the marriages that produced them suggests that in general, marriages have resulted in continuously fewer and fewer births with a slight superimposed fall and compensatory rise in the last few years. In New Zealand, there has been only a negligible rise in the number of couples who have children during the first year of marriage, and this rate is still at a much lower level than in any year before 1939.

Current trends in wartime may be summed up as follows: (1) the greater part of the wartime rise in births is the result of the increasing numbers of marriages. (2) It is probable that the women who are now having first children, and, to a rapidly lessening degree, second, third and fourth children,