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# Canadians projected to live longer than ever

As more couples postpone childbearing, deaths could exceed births in about 35 years

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Statistics Canada ended a year of anxiety among policy makers yesterday by announcing that the bellwether figures on infant mortality, life expectancy and death are again going in the right direction.

"It's a relief," said François Nault, senior analyst in Statscan's health statistics division, noting that some had speculated that the reversals in these key population trends were the result of cuts to hospital beds.

"Apparently no, it's just a blip. It's not a trend," Mr. Nault said.

Statscan said the life-expectancy figures for both men and women rose in 1994 after having unaccountably fallen in 1993. In fact, in 1994, life expectancy rose to its highest ever for Canadians, to 75.1 years for men and 81.1 for women born in that year.

The rate of infant mortality, considered the most basic measure of the health of any population, fell slightly in 1994, as it has done for 31 of the past 32 years in Canada. In 1993, it went the opposite way, rising to 6.3 deaths for every 1,000 births from 6.1 the year before, to the consternation of health officials, demographers and statisticians.

Although the 1994 rate of 6.28 moves the trend line back the way it has gone for dec-

ades, it still does not match the rate in 1992.

Officials at Health Canada were so worried about the rise in the infant mortality rate reported last year they launched an investigation through the bureau of reproductive and child health division of the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control, the results of which are just now emerging.

"One increase after a long period of reductions in numbers has to be studied carefully and on its own," Catherine McCourt, acting director of the bureau, said in an interview yesterday.

In fact, the rise in the rate was taken so seriously that Health Canada epidemiologist K.S. Joseph and McGill pediatrician and epidemiologist Michael Kramer have written a paper on the phenomenon, which is currently under consideration for publication by a major national journal.

In general, the researchers found that the rise in infant mortality in 1993 was the result of a growing trend towards registering as live births babies that are born weighing under 500 grams. These infants have a low rate of survival and in earlier times might have been considered stillborn.

Dr. McCourt said that the fact that the 1994 rate has not returned to the 1992 level is likely fruit of the same trend.

Statscan reported yesterday that the overall number of deaths in Canada in 1994 was also back on track after the huge, unexpected 1993 rise. In 1993, the percentage increase from the year before in the number of Canadian deaths was 4.3 per cent, the highest figure since so many died in the Second World War.

In 1994, the increase was only 1.1 per cent for a total number of deaths of 207,077. Statscan said the aberrant 1993 figures were likely the result of a serious flu epidemic in March and April of that year.

Statscan also announced yesterday that the number of births in Canada in 1994 dropped for the fourth year, falling 0.8 per cent to 385,112 births from 388,394 a year earlier. The agency said this decline is the result of the general aging of the Canadian population and the trend of modern couples toward postponing childbearing.

This means that the natural increase in Canada's population, calculated by subtracting deaths from births, was 178,035 in 1994, almost 3 per cent lower than the natural increase the year before. Statscan noted that if this figure continues to decline, deaths will outstrip births in about 35 years. Then, without immigration, Canada's population would begin to shrink.

The article EM9633 reprinted above is used in Chapter 1 of the STAT 231 Course Materials.