Studying the **age structure** of a population depicts the number of individuals at different age groups. Age structure diagrams are used to predict future patterns of growth or declines, shown in Figure 17.4. The age structure of developing nations is pyramid in shape, showing that there are many more young than old. This indicates that the population is growing. In developing nations, the age structure diagram is rectangular, with individuals evenly distributed at each age level. This indicates that populations in developing nations are stable. Age structure diagrams help us to predict rates of growth for populations.

Of course, number of children actually being born is an important factor in predicting population growth. Fertility rate is defined as the average number of children born to females in a population. The world fertility rate declined from 6.5 children per mother in 1950 to 2.5 today. The declines in fertility rate, due to education programs, contraception access, and other methods, have slowed the world population growth. However, fertility rate is still above the replacement level of 2.1. Only China, with rates around 1.6, will experience population decreases due to their one child per couple policy.
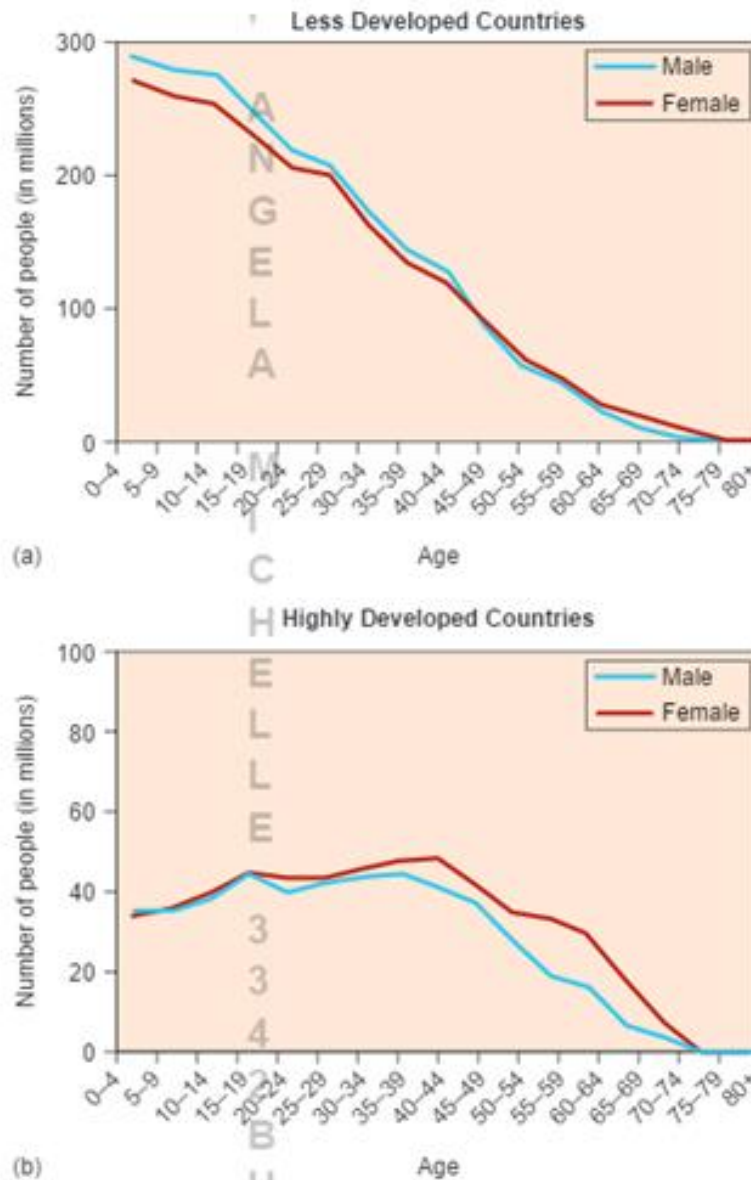

Figure 17.4 Age structure diagrams: developing and industrialized nations. Developing nations show a greater proportion of younger people and thus are predicted to have higher rates of growth.