

Anti-Racist Approaches to using ON-Marg

The Ontario Marginalization Index (ON-Marg) is a geographically (Census) based index developed to quantify the degree of marginalization occurring across the province of Ontario. It combines discrete, yet related, census variables into four broader dimensions that contribute to the process of marginalization: households and dwellings, material resources, age and labour force, and racialized and newcomer populations. See [Inventory of race and related data within the ICES repository](#) or the ICES [Data Dictionary](#) for a more detailed description of ON-Marg.

ICES is making new recommendations to enhance and contextualize use of the **racialized and newcomer populations** dimension (referred to as "ethnic concentration" prior to 2021). These recommendations come directly from members of ICES' [Public Advisory Council](#) (PAC) through their work with ON-Marg as part of [a PAC-led Applied Health Research Question](#). Based on suggestions from the PAC, reviewing best practices in the use of race-related data, as well as ongoing consultations with Dr. Arjumand Siddiqi on race and social variable use at ICES, the following recommendations could be considered to optimize communication of the ON-Marg Index. Many of these recommendations are echoed in the [User Guide: 2021 Ontario Marginalization Index \(publichealthontario.ca\)](#). We encourage scientists to continue using the ON-Marg Index, especially in the absence of individual-level race and social data.

1. Avoid stigmatizing language and data labels

The categorization of "most marginalized" to "least marginalized" quintiles in the context of racialized and newcomer populations was concerning for PAC members, as it risks portraying deficit-based interpretations. However, PAC members also recognized that it is important to highlight that racialized populations and newcomers experience racism, discrimination, and marginalization.

- Rather than categorizing quintiles from "most/least marginalized", consider more specific labels such as "neighbourhoods with most/least racialized and newcomer populations".
- Include all 5 quintiles of each measurement, regardless of the dimension.
- If using the term "marginalized", frame it clearly as a situation actively imposed by social structures on these populations. Avoid describing populations as "marginal" as a passive descriptor or trait without this context.

2. Be transparent about the data source's limitations

ON-Marg assigns Factor Scores at a neighbourhood level. Some people within a neighbourhood are not going to be represented by the neighbourhood average.

- There's a risk of misclassifying individuals if ON-Marg is used as a proxy for individual status; risk is proportional to the size of geography used. Using DA-level poses lowest risk of misclassification if using ON-Marg as a proxy for individual-level data.
- Not everyone has the opportunity to respond to the Canadian Census.

- Temporary foreign agricultural workers and people living in congregate settings are not asked some of the census questions, so findings from ON-Marg may not be generalizable to these populations.

The racialized and newcomer populations dimension encompasses the experiences of multiple, distinct communities.

- This dimension should not be used to summarize the experiences of one specific community in isolation or make inferences that could harm or stigmatize certain communities. For example, while Black populations are included in the indicators, combining all racialized groups together may obscure the experiences of this distinct racialized group (i.e., the impacts of Anti-Black racism). "Immigration" and "racialization" are also distinct concepts that should not be conflated.
- Scientists may wish to consider supplementing analyses with other approaches to better understand the impacts of specific driving factors causing health inequities, such as engagement with populations being studied to add qualitative lenses to support any research implications.

3. Contextualize explicitly

Contextualization can help to proactively prevent readers from making assumptions of causes related to biology or poor individual choices.

- Scientists should carefully consider why they are using the Index and how it can be used to name health inequities and/or racism explicitly.
- Consider including a 1-2 liner of contextualization to accompany all results/graphs that make clear that race and ethnicity are social constructs and that systemic racism directly impacts outcomes related to health and service use.

For more information, explore:

- Guidance from ICES on **page 49 - 57** of the [Guidance Document & Framework for Anti-Racist Approaches to Research and Analytics](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Public Health Ontario: Ontario Marginalization Index Updates and Products](#)
- [User Guide: 2021 Ontario Marginalization Index](#)