

## **Mental Retardation and Mental Illness**

### **What's the Difference?**

*a fact sheet for print and broadcast journalists*

#### **Mental Retardation**

**1. Mental retardation\* refers to subaverage intellectual functioning.**

**2. Mental retardation refers to impairment in social adaptation.**

**3. National incidence: 3% of the general population. Ohio incidence: 1.4 to 1.9% of the general population of Ohio is estimated to have severe functional limitation due to mental retardation or other developmental**

#### **Mental Illness**

**1. Mental illness has nothing to do with intelligence. Mental illness is just that, an illness. It can be controlled with appropriate treatment and/or medication. Many people recover completely from mental illness.**

**2. A person with a mental illness may be very competent socially, but may have a character disorder or other aberration.**

**3. National incidence: 16-20% of the general population. Ohio incidence: While approximately 17.5% of the adult population in Ohio could benefit from receiving mental health services, only about 1.3% are considered to**

**disabilities.**

**4. Mental retardation is present at birth or occurs during the period of development.**

**5. In mental retardation, some degree of intellectual impairment can be expected to be permanent.**

**6. A person with mental retardation can be expected to behave rationally at his/her functional level.**

**7. People with mental retardation can also experience different types of mental illness with symptoms such as hallucinations or severe depression, secondary to the condition of mental retardation.**

**be severely disabled as the result of mental illness.**

**4. Mental illness may occur at any age.**

**5. Mental illness is often temporary, and in many instances the condition is reversible.**

**6. A person with mental illness may vacillate between normal and irrational behavior.**

**7. The term mental illness covers a wide variety of symptoms that may indicate that someone is in emotional trouble, including: belligerence, excessive moodiness, suspicion and mistrust, or poor emotional control.**

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**\*Mental retardation is a developmental disability. People with developmental disabilities may experience difficulty in such areas as self-care, language, mobility, learning, self-direction, independent living or self-sufficiency. Some common developmental disabilities in addition to mental retardation are epilepsy, autism, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and Tourette syndrome.**