



Mental Retardation and Mental Illness

What's the Difference?

Mental Retardation

1. Mental retardation* refers to sub average 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 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.

Mental Illness

1. Mental illnesses are medical conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illnesses are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life. Mental illness has nothing to do with intelligence.

Serious mental illnesses include major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and borderline personality disorder.

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

3. Mental disorders fall along a continuum of severity. Even though mental illness disorders are widespread in the population, the main burden of illness is concentrated in a much smaller proportion — about 6 percent, or 1 in 17 Americans — who suffer from a serious mental illness. It is estimated that mental illness affects 1 in 5 families in America.

4. Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character, or poor upbringing. Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people diagnosed with a serious mental illness can experience relief from their symptoms and manage symptoms by actively participating in an individual treatment plan.

5. Individuals with mental illness and their families receive support and services from private practice, their local mental health authority (which may be county-based or regional) and the Ohio Department

of Mental Health.**

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.

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.

***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.**

****Additional resources: NAMI – www.nami.org**