



This assignment requires you to compile and submit a well-written two to four (2-4) page research essay on your previously identified research topic in aging; please note that a title page and reference list are required and do not contribute to the minimum length requirement of the assignment. The purpose of this paper is to link historical and demographic trends to contemporary issues in aging.

Your research essay will rely on the academic, peer-reviewed sources you gathered for the Research Reference List assignment. You must use in-text citations for information you gathered using APA format styling consistently throughout. Your paper will be submitted as a Word document via the Assignments folder in the LEO classroom. Please note that .JPG, .PNG, and .ODT files are not appropriate; all submissions will be submitted by the instructor to TurnItIn for academic integrity review.

Your Research Essay must address the following items:

- Topic selected (brief description)
- Historical background (e.g. When did this become an aging issue? Why?)
- Influence of demography (e.g. What role does the rapidly aging population play as related to your topic?)
- Contemporary aspects (e.g. Why is this an important aging issue now?)

Your paper will be concise and formal (academic) in tone. You must proofread your work prior to submission, and points will be deducted for poor writing quality as well as failure to use APA format. Before submission, carefully review the rubric provided to ensure you have addressed all important aspects of the Research Essay assignment.

## **Aging with Autism**

Autism is a severe mental condition that often causes suffering from the early years of life. The condition results in challenges related with forming relationships, communicating, and using abstract and language concepts. Over the years, researchers have focused on children while examining this mental disorder. Such studies often examine the symptoms of the condition as well as the challenges that autistic children face as they grow up (Geurts, 2012; Smith, 2012). It is important to note that the emphasis on autistic children often leads to less evidence on how the disease affects adults. This paper seeks to examine link historical and demographic trends to the issue of aging with autism.

## **Historical Background**

For a long time, autism has been an issue of interest for researchers because of its adverse effects. Initially, studies on this disorder focused majorly on young adults and children despite the fact that the condition is a lifelong disease. Today, however, researchers consider autism to be a disease that affects health and well-being of aging adults. According to Geurts (2012), aging is one of the factors that impact on cognitive functioning and influences a person's neuropsychological profile. The realization that autism affects people of all ages has made the condition an important area of focus in studies that examine the topic of aging in a population. While linking the problem of autism and aging, Cheak-Zamora, Teti, and First (2015) noted that people with autism often experience a broad range of educational, vocational, and social challenges that affect their health and wellbeing. These are important factors that caregivers must be aware of if they are to provide appropriate services that will improve the well-being of aging adults.

## **Influence of Demography**

Autism is one of the most common and severe developmental disorders that affect people of all backgrounds. The condition impairs communication, social development, and cognitive functioning in a person. If not carefully managed, it makes it difficult for one to live a healthy life. Although a sizable number of studies have been done to examine the issue of autism, little is known about aging people with the disorder. Piven and Rabins (2011) posit that researchers are yet to provide compelling evidence on the relationship between dependencies and disabilities that result from autism and those from aging. Despite this being the case, there seems to be a consensus among researchers that demographic factors such as age contribute to the progression of the disease and affect health and well-being of autistic people (Piven & Rabins, 2011; Courchesne, Campbell & Solso, 2011). Thus, a large influx of seniors with autism can have a significant economic and humanistic impact and burden on the society and the healthcare system.

Autism is a mental condition that brings age-specific abnormalities in a patient. According to Courchesne, Campbell & Solso (2011), autistic people experience an overgrowth of the brain at the early ages of their life. As they age, the condition leads to a decrease in neuron numbers and structural volumes in the brain. These age-specific changes cause anatomic abnormalities such as reduced cognitive functioning and communication problems that affect a person's health and wellbeing. Thus, caregivers must understand the anatomic changes that occur as autistic people age so that they can come up with the right intervention that will lead to desirable clinical outcomes. While exploring the relationship between aging and autism, Lever et al. (2015) noted that aging often affects the working memory performance in all human beings. However, the changes can be more pronounced among people with autism. Using a cross-sectional study design, Lever et al. (2015) compared age-related trends in working memory performance among individual with autism and those without the condition. Results from the study showed that autism leads to poor working memory performance and lower IQ scores. The researcher concluded that basic demographics such as aging affect the progression of the disease and determine its impact on cognitive functioning and working memory performance.

Another recent study by Lever et al. (2017) showed that aging affects interference control among adults with autism. In this case, the researchers compared performance of adults and young people with autism in a Simon conflict task. The study revealed that young people with autism made faster and more errors compared to adults with the condition. In the adult life span, the number and frequency of such errors reduced significantly. These findings show that age affects interference control in people with autism. Furthermore, they support the long-held notion that people with autism tend to be more cautious as they age. The results provide useful tips that can help in understanding the concept of interference control in such patients.

### **Contemporary Aspects**

Autism has evolved to become a contemporary issue in aging debates and studies due to the rising case of the condition and its impact on the health and wellbeing of older adults. According to Mukaetova-Ladinska, Perry, Baron, and Povey (2012), the escalating number of autistic individuals in the society has transformed autism into a major issue in the provision of healthcare services for an aging population. Moreover, it has motivated researchers to explore the relationship between the condition and aging with the intention of providing evidence that caregivers can use to come up with behavioral and cognitive assessment tools for managing the condition. Available research data suggests that aging presents significant challenges to people with autism (Perkins & Berkman, 2012; Piven & Rabins, 2011). Such findings continue to make autism an important issue in studies and discussions around the topic of aging.