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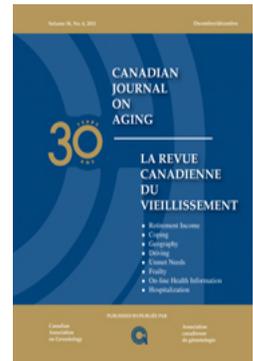
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## Junko Otani. *Older People in Natural Disasters*. Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto University Press, and Victoria, Australia: Trans Pacific Press, 2010.

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preceding sections. The book's final vignette is Hodge's own. In it he talks about his personal experience of having a fall while working on the book and how his reduced independence and mobility compromised his autonomy. His story, like the others provided in the book, poignantly highlights the journey that each one of us either is making or will make as we age.

A second strength of the book is its accessibility. For the most part, the writing is straightforward and suitable for both practitioners and undergraduate students. The theoretical explanations are clear and are not sidetracked into overly technical accounts of academic research. Likewise, the statistics regarding behaviours and demographic change are presented in tables and figures that are easy to understand and which support the author's main points.

In terms of weakness, the work would benefit from the inclusion of more recent theories, developments, and data. Although published in 2008, the bulk of the statistics come from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Early in the book, some statistics from 2001 and 2006 are included; however, they are few and far between. As a result, the book offers an excellent historical context but is in need

of more post-2000 data to reflect the rapidly changing nature of the swelling senior population. Published as it was in 2008, it's perhaps understandable that some of the post-2000 data may have been unavailable at the time of writing. However, literatures and theories could have been updated to include some of the more recent discussions in aging research. In particular, the book would be strengthened by including new developments on age-friendly communities, in particular the ongoing work of the World Health Organization as well as recent work in geographical gerontology, which seems to be completely absent in the current (2008) edition.

Nonetheless, *Geography of Aging* is an excellent and easily accessible introduction to aging and planning suitable for readers in both planning and gerontology. It sensitizes planners to the needs of seniors choosing to age in Canadian neighbourhoods and communities. It introduces gerontologists to the perspectives of planners as partners in creating supportive and senior-friendly environments. Any problems related to data and literature could easily be addressed by a new, updated edition, which the author has suggested may be forthcoming.

Junko Otani. *Older People in Natural Disasters*. Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto University Press, and Victoria, Australia: Trans Pacific Press, 2010.

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Recent world events – including the massive earthquakes in Haiti (January 2010), Chile (February 2010), New Zealand (February 2011), and Japan (March 2011) – have increased awareness of the human devastation that is caused by these geologic events. These events have many similarities as evidenced in the news footage showing efforts of the international humanitarian community to respond in the immediate aftermath of such disasters, regardless of the affected nation's level of economic and technologic development. Differences in scenes of destruction and in the search and rescue response are largely a matter of degree (scale, intensity, and immediacy), not kind.

Differences that reflect the significance of local and cultural factors become increasingly apparent as the emphasis shifts from disaster response to recovery mode. Disaster recovery includes a wide range of activities aimed at restoring community life and services to "normal" or pre-disaster states. Recovery efforts shape how people will live post-disaster, especially people

who, for various reasons, require a greater degree of organized support to re-establish their lifestyles. Individuals may need assistance to reconstruct their homes, access health and social services, re-constitute and stabilize social networks, and achieve economic viability after a disaster. The extent to which recovery assistance is available, accessible, appropriate, and ultimately effective reflects characteristics of both the local context in which the disaster occurred and the national context in which the recovery effort is situated.

*Older People in Natural Disasters*, by Junko Otani, represents a treasure trove of observations, insights, and interpretations about the long-term recovery process in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake for one disproportionately vulnerable segment of society – older people – in one distinct cultural context: Japanese society. The centerpiece of Otani's book is the Great Hanshin earthquake of January 17, 1995, which measured 7.2 on the Richter scale, and devastated an area twenty kilometers long and one kilometer wide,

including Kobe, Japan, and other nearby cities. It affected 1.6 million inhabitants, killed 6,400 people (half of whom were over age 60), and caused massive physical damage, including the destruction of approximately 400,000 homes. The immediate result was an urgent need for temporary shelter housing (TSH) for displaced people, accompanied by a longer-term need to develop housing for resettlement (known as public reconstruction housing: PRH) on a large scale. The book focuses on the resettlement of elderly people who had neither family support to rely on, nor financial self-sufficiency, first in TSH and then in PRH.

A major strength of the text is the richness of the data that was analyzed to describe the long-term recovery process for the population of interest. The author conducted discourse analysis of media data (TV, newspapers, and fieldwork interviews around the fourth and fifth anniversaries of the earthquake as well as published reports and books) to identify the main foci of public attention and how that changed over time. She also conducted secondary analysis of the annual Hyogo Prefecture Health Surveys (1996–1998) and ethnographic research at several TSH and PRH compounds in central and suburban Kobe. The author's participant observation strategies in these compounds included working as a volunteer waitress at a tea shop, accompanying a public health nurse patrol on home visits, and observing organized social activities. The author matches writing style to context, resulting in an interesting read that ranges from dispassionate academic discourse on facts and figures to intimate self-disclosure of thoughts and feelings while directly engaged in observational data collection. Her description of the use of computer assisted qualitative analysis software (NVivo) to aid in the discourse analysis of media data and content analysis of interviews, field notes, observational data and other documents, reported to be the first such attempt in Japanese research, provides an interesting side-study for those interested in this methodological challenge.

The research poignantly illustrates the long, drawn-out – sometimes unending – process of disaster recovery for older people, especially those who are most vulnerable: those without financial self-sufficiency or family support. The author deliberately and successfully focuses on interpretation of the findings within the Japanese cultural context. For example, she explores

both perceptions and realities of contemporary filial responsibility as well as the contribution of uniquely Japanese social security constructs such as the *minsei iin*, a volunteer system of community carers (mostly men). The concept of loneliness and *kodukushi* (dying alone) is revealed as a phenomenon that sits at the intersection of society's expectations, social realities, and media attention. Otani identifies the notable absence of attention to gender in official and media responses to the disaster and its aftermath as a significant gap.

The analysis has two thrusts: first, to evaluate official response to an actual disaster over the long term and thereby contribute to the knowledge base that guides practice and policy in disaster management; and second, to extrapolate observations from the disaster experience that shed light on the provision of community housing and health care for older, disadvantaged people in contemporary Japan in general. Both foci are valuable. There is an urgent need for research on disaster recovery for its own sake, as natural and human-made disasters are increasing worldwide, secondary to factors such as climate change, human pressures on the environment, and infrastructure failure. There is also an urgent need to better understand the social and mental health implications of different models of housing and service delivery for older adults in light of population aging, increasing urbanization, and changes to family structure. Careful, multi-method, longitudinal research on the social consequences of actual disasters is rare, and vital to both these objectives. This text makes a unique and useful contribution to this literature.

*Older People in Natural Disasters* will be of interest to members of the gerontology community as well as to those who are charged with the logistics of disaster recovery (governmental and social service agencies in particular). Accordingly, the text represents an important accomplishment in cross-disciplinary scholarship. The text will be of interest within Japan, as the nation responds to the immediate challenge of providing short- and long-term re-settlement housing for people displaced by natural disasters, particularly older adults who are among the most vulnerable, as well as to the longer-term challenge of housing an aging population in a changing society. The book will also be of interest outside Japan, as academics, service providers, and policy makers in other nations reflect on their own disaster recovery capacity and their aging populations.