The Rapidly Growing Elderly Population

The rapidly growing elderly population is becoming a serious social problem in many countries. Some countries have been successful at finding solutions for this problem but others have not. Japan is one of the latter countries. Although Japan has one of the highest life expectancy rates and a reputation for good quality of life for its elderly population, it has been unsuccessful at addressing this problem. Compared to other industrialized countries, Japan lags behind in programs for elders who are physically disabled, bedridden or in need of long term care. The current economic crisis is exacerbating this situation as the government is cutting funding for elder programs. This problem resonates deeply with me, and I hope to someday work on finding a solution. It is for this reason that I am applying to the graduate program in social work at Boston University: I seek the skills and knowledge I need to return to Japan and work for a social work service.

My interest in the elderly dates back to my childhood. Growing up with my grandparents greatly influenced my values and personality: they taught me to be self-motivated and disciplined. Their resilience and support has helped me to persevere even when confronted with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Because of their kindness toward me I have a deep respect for them and for elderly people in general. This is what motivates me to become involved in the field of social work.

Traditionally in Japanese society, the care of one's parents is believed to be the children's duty. After World War II, such traditions have evolved due to changes in family structure. No longer is the eldest child the only one to inherit his parent's property, and two-income families have become the norm. These changes have left Japanese people at a loss as to how to care
for their aging parents. The current response to this problem seems to be hospitalization.

Families increasingly hospitalize their elders who are physically disabled, bedridden or in need of long-term care. These individuals are usually transferred to nursing homes, but because of sparse accommodations and a one to two year wait list, they end up staying with family members who are often ill equipped to care for them. As a result, there are a number of incidences of elder abuse by family members and elder suicide. Also, there are many other elderly people who live alone -- every year, many of them die with no one, not even their family members, having knowledge of their death.

Currently there is no social welfare program in Japan that offers assistance to these elders and their families. In the light of these terrible problems, the need for such a program is obvious. My interest in social work is to find ways to develop and improve the types of services available to the elderly in Japan at a systematic level. I want to be involved in the organizing, managing, developing, shaping and planning of social policies related to the elderly. I believe the social work program at Boston University will allow me to do that. By studying macro social work at Boston University, I will learn about established social systems, assessment and intervention strategies. In addition, Boston University's emphasis on urban issues appeals to me immensely. As I will be returning to work in Osaka, the second largest city in Japan, graduate work in this area will better equip me for the challenges I will be facing. To me, an urban mission is a commitment to identify and find solutions to issues faced by urban areas.

I believe I am well prepared for graduate work. During my undergraduate study, I acquired the necessary background knowledge by taking advanced courses in the areas of psychology and sociology, including sociological research methods, social theory, statistics, psychological research, and psychotherapy. Along with these courses, I had an internship at the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence, a non-profit organization. I also
volunteered at Sawayaka-en, a nursing service, and Asunaro Children's Mental Hospital in Japan. From this internship and my volunteer work, I have gained practical experience which I feel will contribute to my academic and professional success.

I expect the graduate work at Boston University to be demanding, challenging, and ultimately rewarding. I look forward to the experience from an intellectual as well as social point of view -- I hope to learn and grow as an individual and a macro social worker. I hope that I will be allowed to do so at Boston University.