

Why did so many
people die in the
kobe earthquake?
essay sample



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Japan is situated in North East Asia between the Sea of Japan and the North Pacific Sea and has a population of 125, 688, 711 (1997) and a total area of 377, 815 kilometres squared (145, 874 square miles). Japan occupies over 3900 islands of which consists of four main islands which are Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku. The central island of Honshu occupies 61 per cent of the total land area and contains 80 per cent of Japan's population. Honshu also contains the capital Tokyo, which is Japan's major city with a population of 8, 019, 938 (1995).

Japan in the 19th century was living in a medieval era that was centuries behind the rest of the world's lifestyle. This came as a great shock to their country as they had been isolated from other cultures for such a long time. Eventually, Japan had to face the concept of joining and chasing the rest of the world in hope it would improve the nation overall. Between 1867 and 1912 Japan pursued an ambitious modernisation program. Within that Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese war, 1904-1905 establishing itself as a world power. Since Japan assembled themselves with the rest of the world and began the modernisation program it has rocketed from being one of the least economically developed countries to the most successful and powerful country in the world. In the space of two centuries Japan has achieved the improbable the richest, most economically developed and overall successful country in the world.

Why if Japan is such a highly developed country is it so vulnerable to earthquakes? Japan knows that it is sitting on a time bomb of three different plates all pushing and sliding their way past each other. However all the county's efforts to equip the country to withstand an earthquake failed on <https://assignbuster.com/why-did-so-many-people-die-in-the-kobe-earthquake-essay-sample/>

January the 17th January 1995 when Kobe was struck by an earthquake that killed nearly 6, 000 people and injured around 40, 000 people. The earthquake was not predicted by very sensitive seismometers and the situation was not taken under control until almost a week later. Why had all Japan's efforts for making a country that could withstand earthquakes failed and why were there so many casualties?

The earth is believed to be made up of 20 rigid plates (these plates are cooled rock called crust which has a very thin surface and varies in sizes) that move very slowly past one another. The movements of these plates have caused new islands, mountains and more dramatically volcanoes and earthquakes. Earthquakes are caused when the edges of these plates collide together thus causing pressure to build up. When this pressure is released a series of shock waves are discharged to the surface from the hypocentre. The focuses of most earthquakes are within 10 miles (16 kilometres) of the earth's surface. However, there have been some occurrences where the earthquakes focus has been as deep as 450 miles (720 kilometres). Most large earthquakes are followed by numerous after shocks (for weeks and even years) and may be preceded by foreshocks.

The power of an earthquake is almost impossible to imagine. Millions of tonnes of rock are moved in the space of a few seconds, and thousands of square kilometres of land may be affected by the shaking. Energy released by earthquakes can be equal to 180 million tons of TNT, more than the first atomic bomb. The largest Earthquakes are sometimes felt more than 1, 000 miles (1600 kilometres) from the source of the shock. The destructive effect of an earthquake depends not just on its size but also on the human

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population of the area affected and any other natural events that may be triggered.

Earthquakes are more likely in some parts of the world than others. Most earthquakes happen along plate boundaries so the countries located near the edges of plates are more likely to suffer earthquakes. Almost 95 out of every 100 earthquakes occur on the boundaries of the Pacific plate and the Mediterranean plate.

Most earthquakes happen along plate boundaries so the countries located near the edges of plates are more likely to suffer earthquakes. Japan lies by three different tectonic plates, they are the Eurasian plate, the Pacific plate and the Philippine plate. This triple junction of plates is one of the most unstable parts of the earth's crust. This is because the combination of so many plates means it is more likely for these plates to collide thus causing an earthquake. That is why Japan is the victim of so many disastrous earthquakes.

On 17th January 1995 at 5: 45am, Kobe was hit by an earthquake measuring 7. 2 on the Richter scale. The earthquake was focused 20 kilometres (13 miles) under the northern tip of Awaji-shima Island this island is directly south of Kobe. The shock wave that came as a result of the earthquake lasted for 20 seconds and caused widespread damage to surrounding areas including Osaka and even Kyoto. The blind fault line near to Kobe was thought to be safe because it had not shifted for 1, 000 but was triggered by the movement of tectonic plates and caused excessive damage. One of the reasons for so many people dying was because the Japanese authorities did

not react quickly enough to the situation. It took them over 4 hours to realise the extent of damage and they were completely overwhelmed. They believed that their buildings would be able to stand the earthquake, as they had been built 5 times stronger than the buildings that collapsed in the Los Angeles earthquake in 1994.

However, more than 200, 000 buildings and homes collapsed, crushing the people inside to death. The first 12 hours after an earthquake are crucial to determine how many people will die as a result of the disaster. However, the Japanese authorities did not react quickly enough by not calling help in till 10: 30, over 5 hours after the initial earthquake that is one of the reasons why so many lives were lost. Compared with the Los Angeles earthquake exactly a year before the Kobe earthquake, one of the reasons only 50 people died in the L. A earthquake is because of the speed of the authorities reactions. Firstly the city's mayor sent fire-fighters and doctors and nurses into the worst affected areas and then the President, Bill Clinton declaring a state of emergency and sent medical crews from all over the United States to Los Angeles.

The Kobe earthquake and the 142 fires that it triggered damaged about 300, 000 buildings and homes (100, 000 were traditional wooden houses), leaving 330, 000 people homeless. The earthquake burned 100 hectares (246 acres) of Kobe, killing 6, 310 people and injuring 43, 000 more. 20, 000 people were trapped in buildings, 5, 000 were pulled out and only 700 were alive. The emergency was not taken under control until almost a week later.

There are many reasons for why so many people died because of consequences of the earthquake. Firstly, the rescue services were unable to get to the worst affected areas because of the fires and the roads that had collapsed or were unstable. The fires were started when leaking gas from broken pipes caught fire and set light to the wrecked wooden houses this killed many survivors. The emergency services were unable to put out the fires because the water pipes were broken. The fires then raged for nearly seven days in Kobe until there was nothing left to burn. So the rescue services had to work their way around and in between the fires trying to save the people trapped in their homes or in the fires.