

BBC Learning English
6 Minute English
Blind Massage Therapists



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Yvonne: Hi, I'm Yvonne Archer and this is '6 minute English'. And joining me today is William Kremer. Hello William!

William: Hello Yvonne!

Yvonne: Now recently, I heard an interesting report about how, in South Korea, only people who are blind are legally allowed to do a certain type of work.

William: Oh – but what type of work? And is that law fair to everyone else – especially to people with other types of disability?

Yvonne: Well, they're all good questions William – but before we find out a few answers, I've got a question for you. Are you ready?

William: As ever...

Yvonne: Good! Approximately how many people in the world are living with a disability of some kind? Is it

- a) two percent
- b) ten percent OR
- c) twelve percent

William: I don't know but I'm guessing B – ten percent. Because there's a lot of old people obviously, and old people very often have disabilities of one kind or another. And there's unfortunately, there're a lot of wars and that leaves people with a lot of disability. So ten percent...



Yvonne: Good answer - ten percent. Okay, we'll find out whether you're right or wrong at the end of the programme. Since 1963, people in South Korea who are blind have been the only ones allowed to work as massage therapists. William, what type of job that?

William: Certainly. A 'massage therapist' is a person who mainly uses their hands and fingers to rub different areas of the body, head, arms or legs to help stop pain or to help people move more easily. So someone who's been in an accident, for example, might have 'massage therapy'.

Yvonne: And people in South Korea, especially those who've recently become blind, are really happy that the law keeps those jobs for them. But people who aren't blind want that law changed so that they can also earn money in the same way. In today's report, we'll come across the expression 'to cope with demand'. William, what's that mean?

William: Yes, if a person or a company 'copes with demand', they provide what their customers need when they need it. So for example, a dressmaker who can't sew all her customers' dresses on time has more work than she can manage and she can't 'cope with demand'.

Yvonne: Great – and what does 'awash with' mean?

William: 'Awash' literally means covered with water. But here, it means that there's lots of something. So for example, if you said 'London is awash with tourists in the summer' it means that there's lots of tourists in London in the summer.

Yvonne: Excellent. Now in his report, the BBC's John Sudworth explains that there are about seven thousand massage therapists who are blind in South Korea. But how many people who aren't blind would like to be legal massage therapists too?



JOHN SUDWORTH

There may be seven thousand, but they can't cope with demand. South Korean cities are awash with massage parlours, barbers' shops and bath houses – all offering massages by unlicensed, sighted practitioners. An estimated half a million of them in total.

Yvonne: So the cities in South Korea are awash with all kinds of businesses which offer massages. But William, how many sighted people – people who can see - are breaking the law by providing those massages?

William: Well, John says that there are about half a million people who are working illegally – without a licence.

Yvonne: That's right – and they've asked the courts to change the law because they believe it's unfair to stop them from earning money and it actually makes them into criminals by doing massages.

Now the massage therapists who are blind aren't happy either...

JOHN SUDWORTH

Now blind masseurs and masseuses have been taking to the streets to defend their monopoly. Some massage therapists have even jumped off bridges into the Han River.

William: Wow – that's a powerful protest. They really do want to keep their legal right to be the only group of people who can become massage therapists; they're desperate to hold onto their 'monopoly'.

Yvonne: They certainly are and luckily, so far, no-one has been seriously hurt in the protests. Now even though there's more than enough work for everyone, blind people are worried that this won't always be the case - and say it would be really difficult for them to find other types of work. But here's a final question from John which gives us all something else to think about:



JOHN SUDWORTH

So is massage work a valuable protection for a vulnerable minority, or a patronising excuse for a lack of equality?

Yvonne: Hmmm, a question the courts will have to answer. But William, what are your thoughts - should certain jobs be kept for people with disabilities?

William: Umm...I don't know – that's a very, very difficult question. Umm – maybe. Maybe that's the fairest thing until everyone can apply for every job. I don't know.

Yvonne: Well, there's a lot to think about and discuss after the programme. But for now, let's get the answer to today's question: William, approximately how many people in the world are living with a disability of some kind?

William: I said ten percent...

Yvonne: You're absolutely right.

William: Yeah!

Yvonne: It's an extraordinary number, isn't it?

William: It is actually. It's a much higher number than a lot of people would think, I believe.

Yvonne: Anyway, that's all we've time for today – but do join us again next time for more '6 Minute English' from BBC Learning English.

W/Y: Goodbye!