

**Listen to this extract from a radio interview. The host (Ann) is talking to a local MP (Damian) about the problem of binge drinking in the UK.**

**Optional activity:**

While you listen, decide which of the following summaries best describes Damian's viewpoint.

1. Binge drinking in the UK is a problem because it gives the rest of Europe a very negative impression of the British.
2. Binge drinking in the UK is a social problem that has existed for a long time and hasn't got any worse despite an increase in media coverage.
3. Binge drinking in the UK is a problem because it costs the Health Service a lot of money

A: Thanks for coming along to the studio today Damian. We are going to talk about alcohol – and more to the point – alcohol abuse – what we've come to know as binge drinking.

D: Yes. Thanks for inviting me Ann.

A: We keep hearing about cases of binge drinking – in the newspapers, on television, in magazines – and on radio chat show like this one today. But – what exactly is binge drinking? What does the term mean? Is there a difference between binge drinking and just plain old "getting drunk"?

D: Well, the British Medical Association states that "there is no consensus on the definition of binge drinking". In the past we used the term 'binge drinking' to an extended period of time – a couple of days for example – when a person would continue to drink alcohol to such an extent that he – or she – would abandon their usual activities – such as work – or, in the case of younger drinkers – classes. In medical terms we usually agree that binge drinking refers to the thresholds that we have for "holding our drink".

A: But isn't binge drinking all about drinking lots of alcohol in a short space of time? And don't we usually think of young people when we hear the term used? People who shouldn't really be drinking alcohol in the first place?

D: Well you are right about the first point. In common usage – probably because of all the recent media coverage – binge drinking has come to mean a heavy bout of drinking in just one evening – or a similar time span. Another factor is the intention.

A: The intention?

D: Yes – the fact that binge drinkers actually set out to get drunk. That's their goal – what they are trying to do. Binge drinkers aren't usually solitary drinkers. They drink in groups – sometimes very large groups – especially in the case of teenagers. And binge drinkers are getting younger and younger – if you believe what you read in the press.

A: So – let's get this clear. Large groups of kids get together with the sole intention of getting drunk?

D: In a nutshell yes.

A: And is binge drinking a particularly British problem? Surely young people drink in other countries too?

D: Yes. You are right. Lots of countries have problems with youngsters drinking. But it does seem as though the UK is taking a particular interest in the problem – let's say that here – in Britain – we see binge drinking as a huge social problem. In other countries it's perceived as less of a problem.

A: And should we be worried? Is it a problem?

D: Well, that depends. I certainly think so – yes! In 2003 the cost of binge drinking was estimated as twenty billion pounds – the figure will have risen considerably since then I'm sure. In 2005 the government released figures from the Health Service that suggested that a million accident and emergency admissions each year are a direct result of alcohol consumption. And the emergency services report that Friday and Saturday nights they can hardly cope with the demand for attention.

A: So why are the British so notorious when it comes to binge drinking? Are we worse than other European countries?

D: The culture of drinking in the UK is very different from other countries like France, Spain or Italy. In most mainland European countries children grow up seeing alcohol consumed slowly – a drop of wine with a meal – the odd beer on a sunny afternoon. In the UK we go out to the pubs and up until recently the pubs all closed at eleven on the dot. So – what happens? Well – you drink as fast as you can so that by the time eleven comes around you aren't left feeling like another drink!

A: Do you think we are used to seeing people drunk in Britain? Or do we still get shocked?

D: It depends really. But being drunk isn't socially unacceptable in most European countries – whereas in the UK – well, in some social circles quite the reverse is true.

A: I'm afraid that's all we have time for .....

**Answer key: 3.**