AUSTRALIANS are drinking more alcohol than they were in 2001, with 15 to 19-year-olds drinking significantly more than adults, according to research published in the Medical Journal of Australia.

Professor Farhat Yusuf and Emeritus Professor Stephen Leeder, from the Menzies Centre for Health Policy at the University of Sydney, compared data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ National Health Surveys conducted in 2001 and 2011-2012.

The weighted average daily alcohol intake increased between the two surveys by 13%, from a mean of 3.9 standard drinks in 2001 to 4.3 in 2011–2012. Over the same period, consumption among men increased from 4.7 to 5.0 standard drinks, and for women from 2.8 to 3.4 standard drinks.

“While women consumed much less alcohol than men in each survey, the gender gap had narrowed — women had consumed 40% less alcohol than men in 2001, but only 33% less during 2011–2012”, Yusuf and Leeder wrote.

Data for 15 to 19-year-olds were not collected in 2001, but the 2011-2012 survey revealed that 41.6% had consumed alcohol during the week before the interview, compared with 60.1% of those 18 years or older.

“The average daily consumption over days recorded for those aged 15–19 years was 7.1 standard drinks. This was 65% higher than the average for adults (4.3 standard drinks)”, the researchers wrote.

“The gender gap in alcohol consumption for this age group was only 9%, compared with 33% for adults.”

The data also revealed that “tertiary qualifications, employment and white-collar occupations were associated with lower daily levels of alcohol consumption”.

“Moreover, relatively disadvantaged people reported higher consumption levels, and they also spent a somewhat larger proportion of their household budget on alcohol.”

Among those 18 years of age or older, 29.2% of men and 10.1% of women had exceeded the 2009 National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for “safe levels”, while the corresponding figures for those aged 15–19 years were 35.0% (men) and 19.8% (women).

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