



Highlights of [GAO-06-818](#), a report to the Chairman and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Between 1998 and 2004, Congress appropriated over \$1.2 billion to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) for the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. The campaign aimed to prevent the initiation of or curtail the use of drugs among the nation's youth. In 2005, Westat, Inc., completed a multiyear national evaluation of the campaign.

GAO has been mandated to review various aspects of the campaign, including Westat's evaluation which is the subject of this report. Applying generally accepted social science research standards, GAO assessed (1) how Westat provided credible support for its findings and Westat's findings about (2) attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of youth and parents toward drug use and (3) youth self-reported drug use.

What GAO Recommends

Given that Westat's evaluation stated the campaign did not reduce youth drug use nationally, Congress should consider limiting appropriations for the campaign, beginning in the 2007 fiscal year budget until ONDCP provides credible evidence of a media campaign approach that effectively prevents and curtails youth drug use. ONDCP's written comments on our report generally disagreed with the findings. Specifically, ONDCP does not believe the Westat findings reflect the campaign's effectiveness. We believe the Westat study is sound.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-818.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Laurie Ekstrand, (202) 512-8777, ekstrandl@gao.gov.

ONDCP MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Contractor's National Evaluation Did Not Find That the Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign Was Effective in Reducing Youth Drug Use

What GAO Found

GAO's review of Westat's evaluation reports and associated documentation leads to the conclusion that the evaluation provides credible evidence that the campaign was not effective in reducing youth drug use, either during the entire period of the campaign or during the period from 2002 to 2004 when the campaign was redirected and focused on marijuana use. By collecting longitudinal data—i.e., multiple observations on the same persons over time—using generally accepted and appropriate sampling and analytic techniques, and establishing reliable methods for measuring campaign exposure, Westat was able to produce credible evidence to support its findings about the relationship between exposure to campaign advertisements and both drug use and intermediate outcomes. In particular, Westat was able to demonstrate that its sample was not biased despite sample coverage losses, maintained high follow-up response rates of sampled individuals to provide for robust longitudinal analysis, established measures of exposure that could detect changes in outcomes on the order of magnitude that ONDCP expected for the campaign and that could reliably measure outcomes, and used sophisticated statistical methods to isolate causal effects of the campaign.

Westat's findings on the effects of exposure on intermediate outcomes—theorized precursors of drug use—were mixed. Specifically, although sampled youth and parents' recall of campaign advertisements increased over time, they had good impressions of the advertisements, and they could identify the specific campaign messages, exposure to the advertisements generally did not lead youth to disapprove of using drugs and may have promoted perceptions among exposed youth that others' drug use was normal. Parents' exposure to the campaign led to changes in beliefs about talking about drug use with their children and the extent to which they had these conversations with their children. However, exposure did not appear to lead to increased monitoring of youth. Moreover, the evaluation was unable to demonstrate that changes in parental attitudes led to changes in youth attitudes or behaviors toward drug use.

Westat's evaluation indicates that exposure to the campaign did not prevent initiation of marijuana use and had no effect on curtailing current users' marijuana use, despite youth recall of and favorable assessments of advertisements. Although general trend data derived from the Monitoring the Future survey and the Westat study show declines in the percentage of youth reportedly using marijuana from 2002 to 2004, the trend data do not explicitly take into account exposure to the campaign, and therefore, by themselves, cannot be used as evidence of effectiveness. In Westat's evaluation of relationships between exposure and marijuana initiation the only significant finding was of small unfavorable effects of the campaign exposure on marijuana initiation during some periods of data collection and in some subgroups.