

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***Evaluation Provides Credible Evidence that National Youth
Anti-Drug Media Campaign Was Not Effective in Reducing Youth Drug Use***

An evaluation of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign provides credible evidence that the campaign was not effective in reducing youth drug use, according to a report by the U.S. Government Accounting Agency (GAO). Between 1998 and 2004 Congress appropriated more than \$1.2 billion to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) for the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, a project that aimed to prevent and reduce youth drug use (primarily marijuana and inhalants). In 2005, Westat, Inc., completed an ONDCP-funded evaluation of the campaign. At the mandate of the Senate Appropriations Committee, a team of GAO social scientists reviewed and assessed Westat's evaluation, applying generally accepted social science research standards. Following are some of the conclusions from the GAO report:

- While the ONDCP does not believe that the Westat evaluation reflects the campaign's effectiveness, the GAO concludes that the Westat study used "generally accepted and appropriate sampling and analytic techniques" and established "reliable and sufficiently powerful measures of campaign exposure" (p. 22).
- Youth and parents' recall of campaign advertisements increased over time and their impressions of the advertisements were favorable.
- There was no evidence that exposure to the campaign affected initiation or cessation of marijuana 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.
- The campaign generally had no effect on the anti-drug attitudes and beliefs of youth who did not use marijuana. However, greater exposure to the anti-drug ads was associated with increases in the belief that their peers used marijuana regularly.
- Parental exposure was associated with changes in beliefs about discussing drug use with their children and the extent to which they had these conversations, but did not lead to increased monitoring of youth.

The GAO recommends that "Congress should consider limiting appropriations for the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign . . . until ONDCP is able to provide credible evidence of the effectiveness of exposure to the campaign on youth drug use outcomes or provide other credible options for a media campaign approach" (p. 7). A full copy of the GAO report, including responses from ONDCP, is available online (<http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/ordtab.pl?Item0=GAO-06-818>).

NOTE: In late 2005, ONDCP launched a newly designed campaign. The impact of this campaign is not known and should be independently evaluated.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), "ONDCP Media Campaign: Contractor's National Evaluation Did Not Find That Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign Was Effective in Reducing Youth Drug Use," Report to the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, August 2006.

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The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention funded this project under grant BJAG 2005-1206. All points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of any State agency.