

# APA's training model: Is it really based on the Defense Department experiment?

(For that matter, how relevant was the DoD program to training civilian psychologists?)

In the Defense Department's 1991–97 Psychopharmacology Demonstration Project (PDP), 10 military psychologists were trained to prescribe psychotropic drugs.

The claim is repeatedly made that the APA training model is based on this largely successful project

Here are the facts. See if you agree.

## Defense Department training

- 712 hours of academic instruction, taking 1 full year (originally: 1,418 hours and 2 years)
- 1 additional year of full-time, supervised practice

Total training time: 2 years

## APA training model

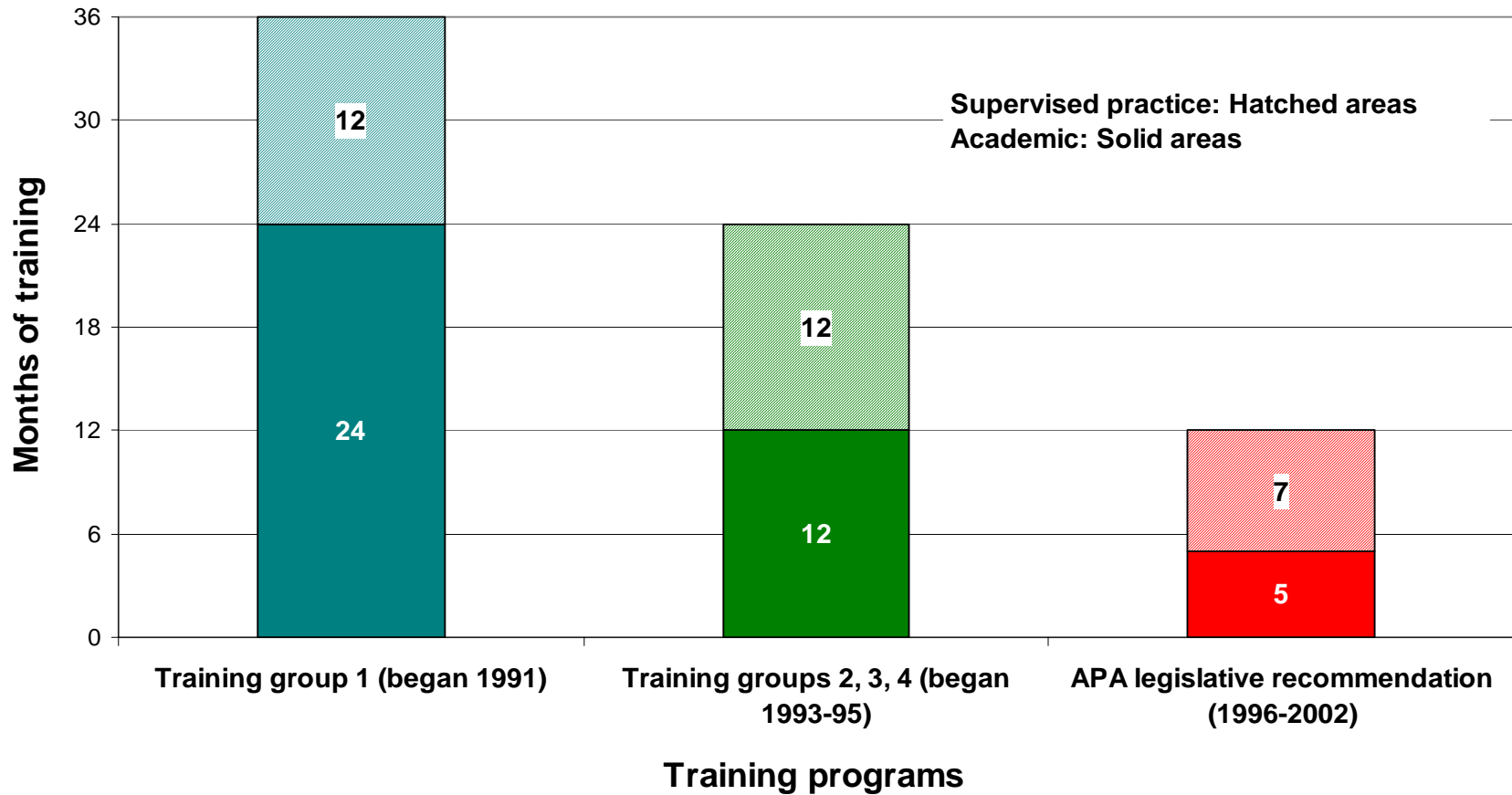
- 300 hours of academic instruction (about 5 months, or one semester)
- Supervised practice involving 100 patients (at most, 7 full-time months)

Total training time: 1 year

That's a reduction of 58% in academic instruction...

and a reduction of 42% in supervised practicum.

# DoD and APA training programs compared



## Other differences

- The DoD training took place at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and Walter Reed Army Medical Center.
- APA, in contrast, would allow credit for weekend workshops and Internet courses — both of them untested as methods of basic medical education.

## Still more differences

- DoD's military populations were screened at enlistment for better-than-average mental and physical health.
- Trainees treated no children, no elderly, and few complex cases.
- Medical backup and consultation were routinely available.



## And, finally...

- The trainees were closely monitored by the DoD, the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, and the General Accounting Office. They were the most scrutinized future prescribers in history.

Nothing remotely like this will happen in the medical training of civilian psychologists.

Oh (as Columbo says), just one more thing...

The APA training model also falls short of these other key benchmarks —

1. The 1992 recommendations of APA's [Ad Hoc Task Force on Psychopharmacology](#)
2. The recommendations of the [Blue Ribbon Panel](#) that APA supported in 1993–1995

## Ad Hoc Task Force:

At least 2 years didactic instruction, plus...

Supervised clinical experience (duration not specified)

## Blue Ribbon Panel\*:

395–570 classroom/lab hours (6–9 months), plus...

18 months clinical practicum

\* Sponsored by California Psychological Association and California School of Professional Psychology, funded by APA, and convened by 1995 APA President Ronald Fox.

Now, another perspective...

## What members of the ACNP. Evaluation Panel are saying

The American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) is an interdisciplinary society. Its members are psychologists, psychiatrists, and other physicians — all with outstanding credentials and expertise in psychopharmacology.

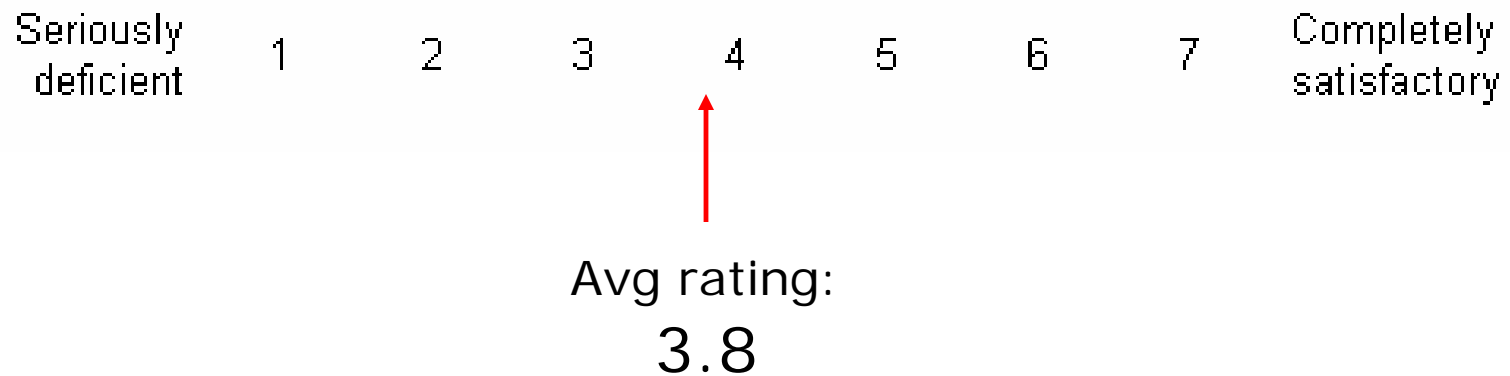
ACNP was retained by the Defense Department to appoint an Evaluation Panel to monitor and report on the PDP's performance.

- The panel included 5 psychologists and 5 psychiatrists.
- They worked for 7 years, from 1991 until 1997.
- Their final report came out in May 1998.

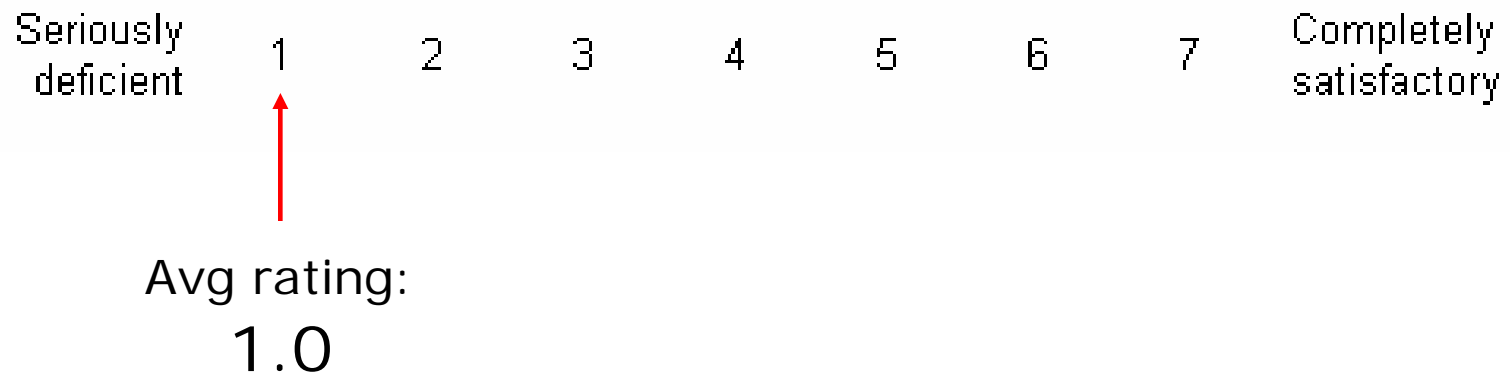
In June 2003 the 10 Evaluation Panel members were asked their opinions about the differences between the PDP and the APA training model.

Five of them responded — all under guarantee of anonymity. Here's how they rated the PDP and the APA curricula from the standpoint of civilian practice.

Q. 2a. The PDP curriculum was designed to train **military** psychologists. How adequate do you think it would be as a training model for psychologists in **civilian** practice?



Q. 3a. How adequate do you think the **APA** model curriculum is as a training model for psychologists in civilian practice?





The panelists were also asked three open-ended questions:

- **Q. 1:** Their overall opinion of the differences between the PDP and APA curricula.
- **Q 2b:** The changes they thought would be needed to make the PDP program completely satisfactory for training civilian psychologists.
- **Q. 3b:** The changes they thought would be needed to make the APA model completely satisfactory.

## The bottom line

- **PDP:** While their 1998 report gave it generally high marks for training military psychologists, the ACNP evaluators were lukewarm about its adequacy for training civilians.
- **APA model:** In a nutshell, they condemned it — unanimously.