

Salcuni, S., Di Riso, D., & Lis, A., (2014). "A child's nightmare. Mum comes and comforts her child." Attachment evaluation as a guide in the assessment and treatment in a clinical case study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00912.

**Author Abstract:**

There is a gap between proposed theoretical attachment theory frameworks, measures of attachment in the assessment phase and their relationship with changes in outcome after a psychodynamic oriented psychotherapy. Based on a clinical case study of a young woman with Panic Attack Disorder, this paper examined psychotherapy outcome findings comparing initial and post-treatment assessments, according to the mental functioning in S and M-axis of the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM). Treatment planning and post-treatment changes were described with the main aim to illustrate from a clinical point of view why a psycho-dynamic approach, with specific attention to an "attachment theory stance", was considered the treatment of choice for this patient. The Symptom Check List 90 Revised (SCL-90-R) and the Shedler-Westen Assessment Procedure (SWAP-200) were administered to detect patient's symptomatic perception and clinician's diagnostic points of view, respectively; the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and the Adult Attachment Projective Picture System (AAP) were also administered as to pay attention to patient's unconscious internal organization and changes in defense processes. A qualitative description of how the treatment unfolded was included. Findings highlight the important contribution of attachment theory in a 22-month psychodynamic psychotherapy framework, promoting resolution of patient's symptoms and adjustment.

From p. 11: In this case, "the child signals his attachment need after a "nightmare" (Segregated System in AAP) and the mother is able to provide a contingent and soothing answer, containing the potential breakdown of the attachment system and resolving the Segregated System. Both AAI and AAP classified Matilde as secure with somewhat dismissing or restricted feelings in attachment without elements of unresolved abuse or trauma. However, both tools detected some shortcomings about fears of separation and danger. The AAI was not able to draw attention in an exhaustive way to how Matilde experienced abandonment fears and felt scared without the presence of her parents. Instead the AAP clearly depicted this nuance, under a secure pattern, showing that her attachment was threatened by painful attachment-related feelings of loss, and by a nightmare (in Bed picture), a signal of danger. In both tools she demonstrated her ability to re-organize herself, but these disturbing feelings kept being alive underneath her reorganized secure pattern."