

Using the TAAI with adolescents in care

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Supervision of staff of facility for out-of-home placed minors

- 4 houses: two for girls and two for boys
- Age range: 8 to 18
- Focus: staff issues
- Occasionally: help in formulating cases

Outcomes of the TAAI

1. Self-protective strategy
2. State of adaptation of the strategy to the context (strategy modifiers)
3. Traumatic responses to past dangers (unresolved losses or traumas)

Fatima

1. 13 years old

Fatima - Question from the staff

- Fatima appears cold and distant, even after 4 years in the facility.
- She shows no interest or motivation for anything.
- Exception: her brother, living in the nearby facility, who has little time for her.
- She can be manipulative and disparaging.
- Anything we can do? Are we doing something wrong? Or is she

Fatima - History from the TAAI

- Family of origin:
 - mother, maternal grandparents, two brothers (the older is from a previous relationship; Fatima feel closest to the middle one, Alex, 3 years older than her)
- The parents “never worked”,
 - father “always in jail”
 - mother “had problems with alcohol and drugs”.

Fatima - History from the TAAI

- Father physically abused M and brothers (“I don’t know why he left me alone . tsk . I mean . once he slapped me in the face”).
- Mother also physically abused Fatima and Alex (one episode, branch)
- Main carer was MGM, “always present” but old and weak.
- MGF died when Fatima was 2,5y.

Fatima - History from the TAAI

- Fatima says she lived with her family “until I was 6”
- But she also says that she was put in foster care at 2 years of age for 5 years (without siblings).
- During these years she saw her mother “maybe once a month”, when she could find a lift. She didn’t see MGM, “too old to move”.

Fatima - History from the TAAI

- Fatima did not bond with the foster family and being with them was not a good experience with them.
- They had a biological daughter, and fostered another child (“from birth”). Fatima felt they were preferred, and “always right” for the foster parents. She felt neglected.
- Her mother, in the meantime, spent 2 years in a community for addicts.

Fatima - History from the TAAI

- At 7, Fatima is moved to a facility for children out of home with Alex.
- There, she “felt very far away from mother, and all children there were older than me”, but she “quickly adapted”.
- At 9, she is moved again, to the current facility. Alex is in the house for boys nearby.
- Her best friend, Elena, is in the same house. They do many “silly things” together

Fatima - History from the TAAI

- The most important person in her life now is Alex: Fatima defines her relationship with him as “bond”, “love”, “confidence”
- She does not think her mother will be able to change enough to take her back home.

Fatima - How the history is told

- Short, dry, reluctant answers
 - Talks about herself in negative terms
 - Often her language sounds borrowed about how to behave properly:
 - social behavior
 - asking for help when in need
 - parenting
- and also about the negative effect of not “having known a father figure”.

Fatima - How the history is told

- When talking about her family of origin, she makes the time spent with them appear longer than it was; some episodes cannot have happened as told (positive aspects are emphasized).
- Episodes of physical abuse are told with positive affect (laughter) and minimized in their effects. Some of them (involving the father) are too old for her to remember, and yet she talks about them as if she was present

Fatima - How the history is told

- Fatima talks about the foster family with anger and derogation.
- When talking about them, she appears aroused in several ways, and in how she uses language.
- She emphasizes explicitly that she wants nothing to do with them.
- Occasionally, instead of calling the foster parents by name, she slips into using “mom”

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Fatima - How the history is told

- When talking about herself, Fatima cannot describe herself in summative ways
- but states she is “closed”, “violent” and “a piece of shit” with other people.
- She would like to change those attributes, but cannot think of any way to achieve that goal.

Fatima - How the history is told

- At the end of the interview, Fatima will often remark on:
 - the futility of trying to communicate
 - separation from parents was inevitable
 - due to problems that she considers intrinsic to the parents as persons.

Fatima - Two episodes (1)

Can you tell me about your relationship with Alex?

... I mean

I can see you smiling

Because . I mean Alex and I . because . tsk . grandpa had bees . tsk, then, I mean, he and I are mess makers, we make all trouble together, like . my grandpa had also a very high fig tree . tsk, and we always went on it . we hurt ourselves, I mean once . with also, the older . we went . by these bees

Fatima - Two episodes (1)

(smiles) and we took them out . and they all stung us . and grandma had to disinfect us, put cream on, like, we were all swollen . eeh, in fact now Alex is allergic to bees . tsk eeh, mm, then there is (smiles), I don't know, I mean, we scared mom (smiles) I mean to play the fools . we did . yes, these jokes, then we made a mess . we hid, we didn't let ourselves be found, like . I mean we were tied, we did that all together.

(...)

Fatima - Two episodes (1)

Do you remember one time when your mother hit you?

Tsk, yes, because . always the fact that I went by the bees. Eh, then my mom shouted at me “You two, come back inside”, like that and then . Alex and I hid (smiling), tsk, we didn’t want to go back inside. (Clears throat) Then she took a branch . she, like . unpeeled it (inhales) and she was waiting for us inside (smiles) and then Alex and I went in, she gave it to us on the legs... (quickly) then we didn’t do that anymore

Fatima - Two episodes (2)

Instead, do you remember one time when your foster parents hit you?

I mean Lucia . because practically . we were in the car. I mean, it can be a trivial thing, but I remember it well . because I didn't speak much . so Lucia asked me . because we just had dinner at her brothers' and then Lucia asked me "did you put the pencil in the backpack?" . I didn't answer (smiles) eeh, I was in the front . because d-, the younger ones were in the back . and she asked me again many times. I didn't answer. because she asked

Fatima - Two episodes (2)

I was afraid . (inhales) Then she slapped me on the face, tsk, and I have the problem of a very delicate nose and it bled a lot . (inhales) then we got home, she rinsed me, like, just . I mean just calm, I mean not . in a haste like she didn't want to be caught . the daughter came eeh, she asked, Francesca asked her “But mom, what happened?” and she told her “eh, banged against . against the pane, she has a delicate nose and she had a nosebleed”.

And how did you feel then?

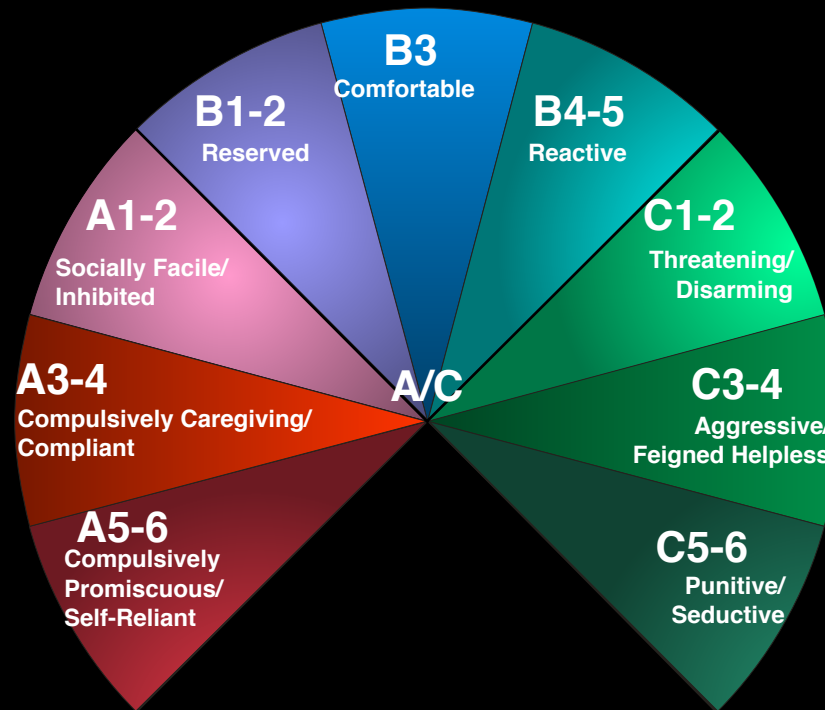
Fatima - Two episodes (2)

(puffs) ... I mean, tsk, I wanted to hit her .
but . I mean I was little . I couldn't do anything
because . I mean I knew that then, tsk,
(quickly) everything would have come back to
me . I mean that maybe she could punish me .
or scold me, so, tsk, so I didn't say anything, I
mean I'd rather be quiet.

Fatima: transcript classification

- (Dp)
- Utr(ds, v)physical abuse
- Utr(dp)abandonment
- A6(7)/C5Δ

DMM self-protective strategies in Adolescence



Fatima - Response to the staff

- The classification of the TAAI confirmed the C5Δ component the staff was aware of
- But added the compulsive self-reliance
- Connecting it with the (known) history.
- The unresolved trauma, especially about abandonment, and the partial depression also motivated the staff to look beyond Fatima's appearance of disengagement.

Valentina

- 15 years old

Valentina - Question from the staff

- Valentina has been in the house for 4 months and a lot of trouble.
- Her language is foul, her attitude constantly insulting towards everybody, staff and girls.
- She has enough leadership skills to be a model for the other girls.
- Should we make a point to have her change manners...? But it looks like an uphill battle.
- Is there a reason for her attitude?

Valentina - History from the TAA

- Family of origin: mother, father and Marco, 1 year older brother.
- Mother worked, father did not (“just went stealing”). Conflict between the parents: Valentina remembers father sleeping on the couch, or being “thrown out on the sidewalk” by mother, and Valentina bringing him food.

Valentina - History from the TAA

- Valentina's oldest memory (7-8y.o.): mother and father throw "dishes, stuff" at each other; they end up in hospital. As this is happening, the children are asked to choose the parent they want to be with. Valentina remembers being slapped in the face by mother for choosing father.
- Shortly after, both children are placed out of home.

Valentina - History from the TAA

- First placement: foster family for 1 month (Valentina says she's still fond of that family).
- Then, siblings are separated and placed in facilities. Valentina's was ran by 5 families by children of their own, living in adjacent units.
- Valentina reports being very attached to Laura (caregiver) but hating her husband "as soon as I saw him". She spends 8 years with them, giving as evidence of

Valentina - History from the TAA

- After an episode of violence involving Marco in his placement, mother decides that both children should be moved nearer her.
- Services agree and move both children to the current facility.
- This new placement is supposed to allow regular contact with mother and her new partner.
- Scheduled visits often degenerate in verbal and physical conflict and have to

Valentina - History from the TAA

- Valentina had been in contact with her father until he “disappeared”. She has not seen him for the last 4 years; he only made some comments via facebook. She now considers him “a fucking piece of shit”.
- She is currently in strong conflict with her brother Marco, but generally feels “targeted by everybody; that’s why I behave like this: a piece of shit, nasty”.
- For the last 2,5 months, she has had a boyfriend who is in her class at school.

Valentina - How the history is to

- Valentina confronts the interviewer right from the beginning about the use of the interview, its confidentiality, the questions; however, she does not efficiently oppose or block the process.
- She claims not to have memories, not to care, that everything is awful, beyond repair.
- She uses scatological language throughout, and also points at how badly she speaks.

Valentina - How the history is told

- Valentina describes her past relationship with her mother as just “distant”.
- The episode to support this descriptor is recent, about his brother hitting Valentina and nonetheless being her mother’s favorite.
- Valentina begins talking about her father saying he was very loving of her (“unlike mother”)
- But soon goes into episodes of conflict and sexual manipulation between F and M.

Valentina - How the history is told

- Overall, she blames her mother
- But she's not consistent in this:
 - at times she takes some or all responsibility for what has happened
 - at other times, she still blames mother but shows clearly her desire for her.

Valentina - How the history is told

- Her arousal is relatively high throughout the interview, not really responding to the interviewer's comfort or challenges.
- She expresses semantic judgments about the unchangeability of her mother and herself.
- Despite the negativity of the situation (“everybody against me”) she has no way out in mind.
- The only positive thing is her boyfriend (“I hope to be with him for all my life”).

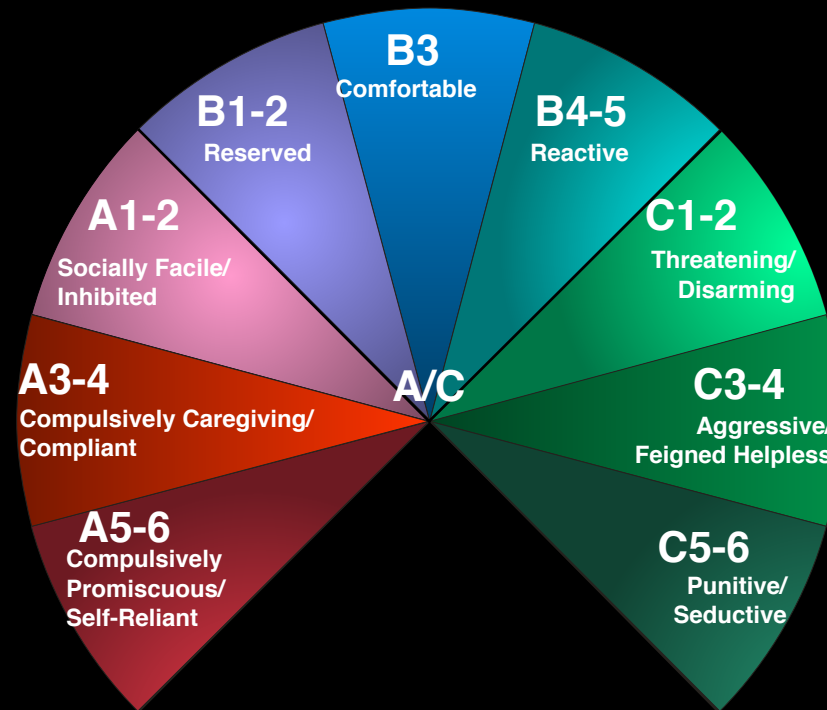
Valentina - How the history is told

- Her first memory (the violent episode somehow culminating in the separation from the parents) is told with unclear temporal sequences, and incoherent parts.
- It is both dismissing of the import of what happened and preoccupied with these past events.
- Mother's being violent is emphasized, and she's blamed for the events more than father (although ultimately he is considered guilty as well).

Valentina: transcript classification

- Dp
- Utr(p/ds)parents fighting/separating
- C3(5) Δ

DMM self-protective strategies in Adolescence



Valentina - Response to the

Staff

- The classification of the TAAI shows how Valentina's aggression is motivated by an intense desire for comfort and fear
- Currently she doesn't seem to find any way to gain comfort and protection (her boyfriend is not responsive to her aggression)
- In other words, she is far from being "robust" as she appears.
- Paradoxical responses of comforting her when she is aggressive might be explored (for a sustained time).