

Is there a specific relationship between childhood separation anxiety and the later development of panic and agoraphobia disorders? (pp. 143-161)

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One persistent hypothesis in the literature is that heightened levels of early separation anxiety are a specific risk factor for developing panic disorder (with or without agoraphobia). In the review carried out by Silove, Manicavasagar, Curtis, & Blaszczynski (1996) these authors concluded that both phenomena were associated, but whether this association reflected a specific relationship or existed also in relation to other disorders was an issue that remained inconclusive. Moreover, they advanced the hypothesis of the possible persistence of early separation anxiety disorder into adulthood, rendering the sufferer vulnerable to panic. Since then, a number of studies have investigated this question, some of them prospectively, so the present article aims to review them critically. The analysis of 28 studies confirms the association between separation anxiety and panic disorder, but it raises great doubts about the specificity of such relationship. Furthermore, separation anxiety disorder also exists in adulthood, but its relationship with panic disorder does not seem to be specific either.