

The Role of Applicant Emotionality and Decision-makers' Pre-existing Attitudes in Asylum Decision-making

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Psychology at the Frontiers: Asylum Interviewing and Decision Making [Psych-AID]

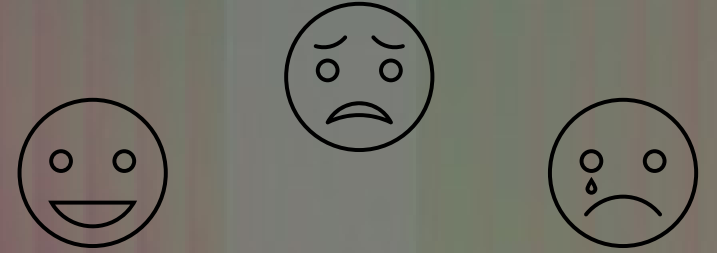


Context of the study: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Sexual, physical, psychological, and socio-economic violence, as well as harmful traditional practices (e.g., female genital mutilation) perpetrated on account of gender (UNHCR, 2003).

- Women are particularly vulnerable to SGBV (Freedman, 2016; UN Women, 2025; Vu et al., 2014).
- Limited supportive evidence
- **Credibility assessment** becomes critical to asylum outcomes (Kagan, 2003; Thomas, 2006)
 - Emotional expression should NOT determine credibility (UNHCR, 2013)

The Emotional Victim Effect



- Displays of **negative emotions** (e.g., sadness) are often perceived as **more credible** compared to neutral or numb expressions (e.g., Ask & Landström, 2010; Nitschke et al., 2019; van Doorn & Koster, 2019).

Emotions can cue authenticity, but also elicit doubt...

Similar effect in asylum decision-making?

Hypotheses

Decision-
makers pre-
existing
attitudes

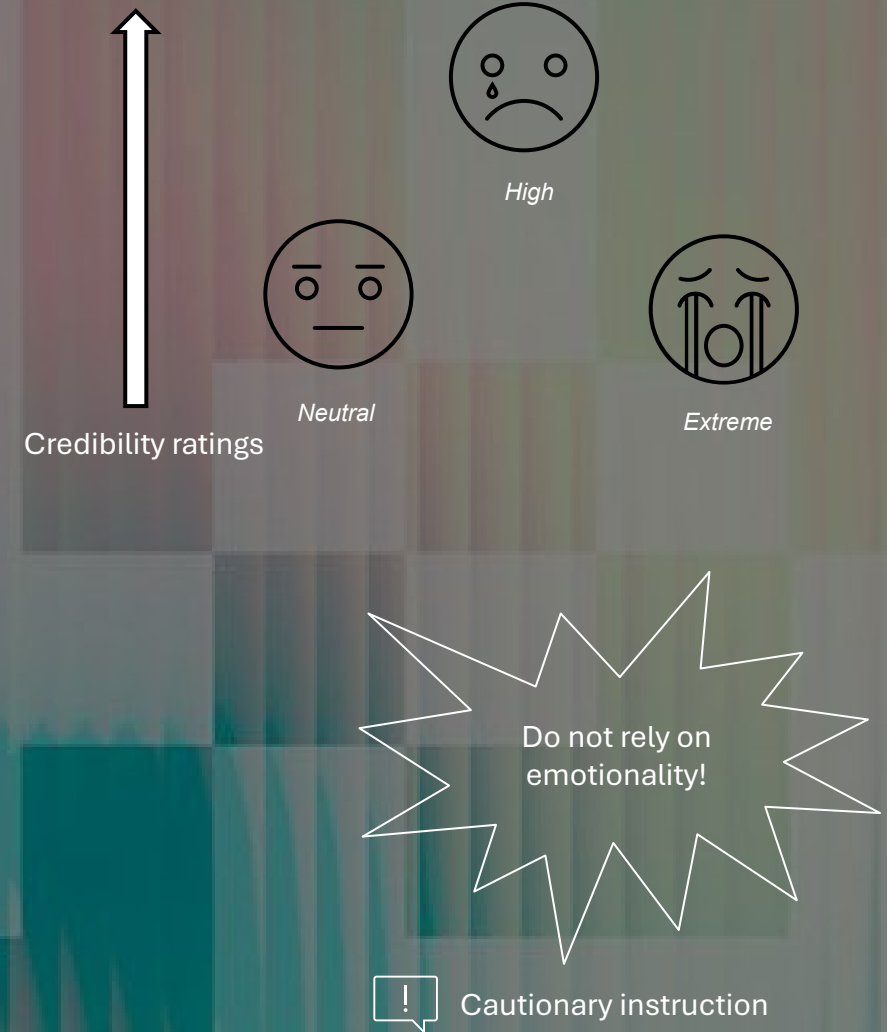
H1. **Emotionality** will affect credibility assessment
(curvilinear relationship)

H2. A **cautionary instruction** will moderate the effect of
emotionality

H3. Higher **rape myth acceptance** → lower ratings

H3. Negative **immigrant attitudes** → lower ratings

Positive **immigrant attitudes** → higher ratings



Methods

Design:

- Between-subjects 3 (neutral, high, extreme emotionality) x 2 (instruction, no-instruction)

Material:

- Vignette
- Cautionary instruction
- Rape myth acceptance (uIRMA; McMahon & Farmer, 2011)
- Positive and Negative Perception of Immigrants Scale (PANPIS; Panno et al., 2023)

Participants:

- 380 (mock) asylum officials
 - Finnish citizens
 - Education > bachelor's degree
 - 78% women

Vignettes:

Neutral:

I: Did they hold you down with their hands or something else?

A: Yes, with their hands.

[It is noted: The applicant pauses briefly before continuing.]

High:

I: Did they hold you down with their hands or something else?

A: Yes... with their hands.

[It is noted: The applicant starts to cry.]

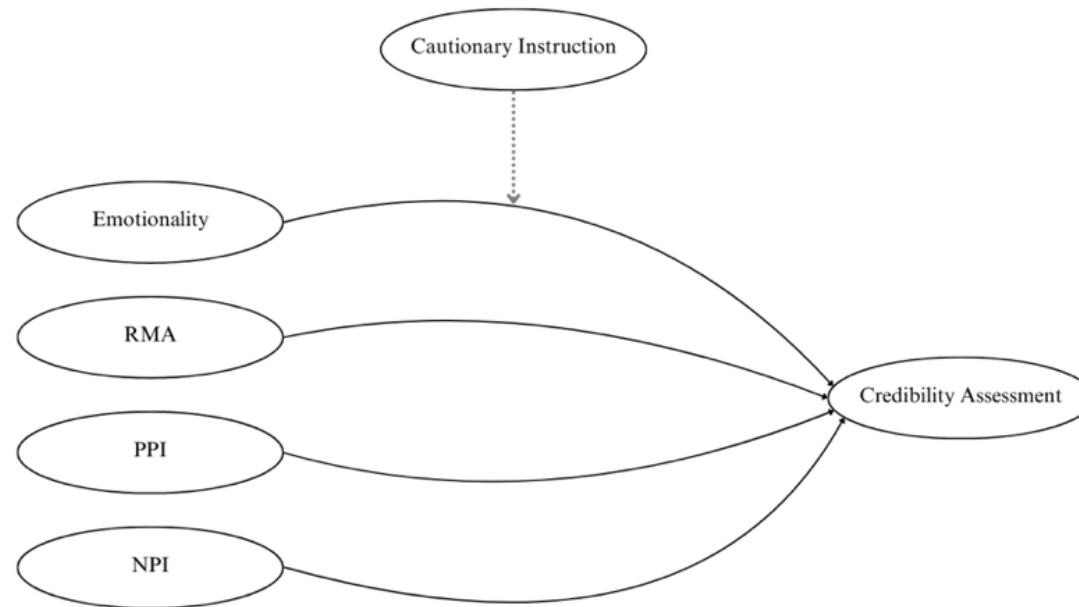
Extreme:

I: Did they hold you down with their hands or something else?

A: Yes... with... their hands!

[It is noted: The applicant begins to scream and cry uncontrollably.]

Conceptual model



RMA (rape myth acceptance), PPI (positive attitudes toward immigrants), NPI (negative attitudes toward immigrants)

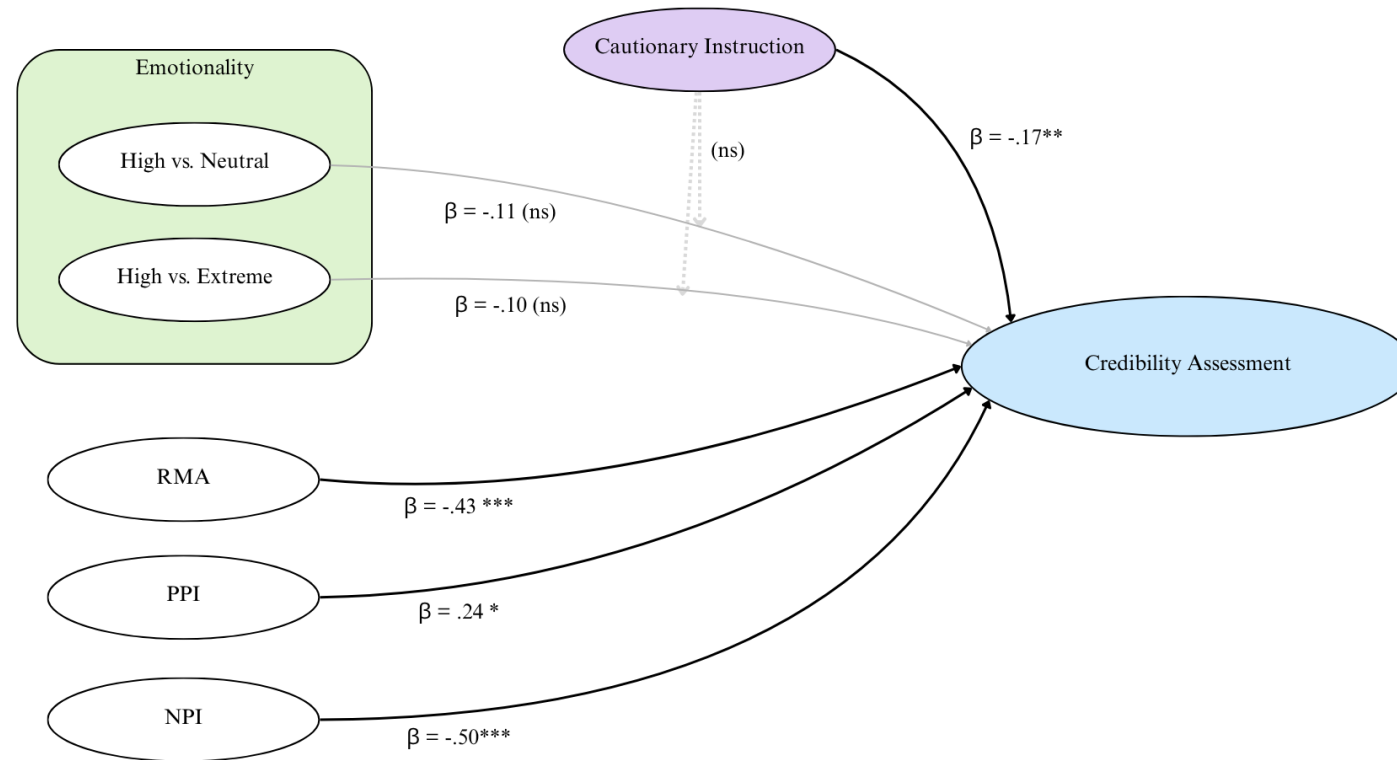
Results

Descriptive Statistics for All Measured Variables by Emotionality Condition

Variable	<i>Neutral Condition</i>	<i>High Condition</i>	<i>Extreme Condition</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Credibility	6.75 (2.36)	7.29 (2.36)	6.83 (2.44)
RMA	1.32 (0.52)	1.33 (0.53)	1.41 (0.70)
NPI	2.64 (0.80)	2.69 (0.85)	2.68 (0.91)
PPI	3.09 (0.91)	3.09 (0.97)	3.03 (1.01)

RMA (rape myth acceptance), PPI (positive attitudes toward immigrants), NPI (negative attitudes toward immigrants)

Results



Summary of Effects Across Separate Structural Equation Models. RMA (rape myth acceptance), PPI (positive attitudes toward immigrants), NPI (negative attitudes toward immigrants). *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Discussion

- Decision-makers attitudes more important than applicant emotionality (?)
- Cautionary instructions = decision-makers sceptical of all evidence ?
- Even subtle differences in rape attitudes can affect credibility assessments (in SGBV-related claims)!

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- Importance of including attitudinal measures in similar future research
- The influence of (prejudicial) attitudes in “real” asylum decision-making?

Thank you for your attention!



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