

# Impression Management

## Ensuring Objectivity: How Assessing Impression Management Strengthens Psychological Reports in Legal Cases



### What Is Impression Management?

Impression management refers to the conscious or unconscious process where individuals attempt to influence how they are perceived by others. In psychological assessments, it can manifest as exaggeration, minimisation, or selective presentation of information.



### Why Is It Important in Forensic Assessments?

- **Objectivity:** Assessing impression management ensures that responses are accurate and not skewed by attempts to present in a specific way.
- **Credibility:** Identifying impression management helps establish whether the individual is approaching the assessment sincerely.
- **Relevance to Legal Context:** Forensic assessments often have high-stakes outcomes. Recognising impression management safeguards against biased conclusions that could unfairly influence a case.



### What Does Impression Management Look Like?

- **Exaggeration:** Overreporting symptoms to appear more impaired or to gain specific outcomes, such as compensation.
- **Minimisation:** Downplaying symptoms or behaviours to appear more favourable, such as in custody disputes.
- **Inconsistencies:** Contradictory statements or test responses that suggest selective reporting.



### Why Treatment Reports Often Lack This Assessment

Treatment reports are designed to track progress and focus on therapeutic goals. They rarely include measures of impression management, which can introduce unintentional bias by assuming honesty in self-reports. This makes them less suitable for forensic purposes.



### How Is Impression Management Assessed?

- **Standardised Tools:** Validity scales in tests like MMPI-3 or PAI detect exaggeration or minimisation.
- **Collateral Information:** Comparing self-reports with external records can identify discrepancies.
- **Behavioural Observations:** Watching for inconsistencies or non-verbal cues during interviews.



### What It Means for the Broader Assessment

- When impression management is identified, it raises questions about the reliability of the individual's self-reported symptoms or behaviours.
- It provides insight into how the individual may have approached the assessment, influencing the interpretation of other findings.
- Transparent reporting of impression management ensures the integrity of conclusions and reduces vulnerability to cross-examination in legal contexts.