



Interviewers' and Interpreters' Experience of Official Finnish Asylum Interviews

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INTRODUCTION

Recent psychological research has highlighted shortcomings and challenges in asylum interview and decision-making procedures. Analyses of real-life asylum interview transcripts have found that interviewers only partly follow best-practice guidelines for investigative interviewing^{1,2,3}. Mainly, interviewers tend to rely heavily on not recommended closed and option-posing questions. However, few previous studies have examined how the interview participants perceive the interviews⁴.

OBJECTIVES

The current study aimed at investigating 1) how asylum interviewers and interpreters in general experience the asylum interviews and 2) how well the perceived practice corresponds with evidence-based interview guidelines.

METHOD

We created two slightly different versions of an online survey on the platform SurveyAnalytics. The surveys consisted of rating scale questions and a few open-ended questions. The following topics were included: preparation, interview dynamics, interview content, interpretation, and general views. The Finnish Immigration Service shared the survey with all their asylum interviewers and interpreters (as well as external interpreters).

PARTICIPANTS

Interviewers

N = 62 (completion rate 90%)

Female 84% Male 13%

Prefer not to tell 3%

Age M = 34.2, SD = 6.6

Years of education M = 18, SD = 1.8

Years working as asylum official: M = 2.9, SD = 2.9, range 0.5-20.3

Interpreters

N = 63 (completion rate 51%)

Female 56% Male 40%

Prefer not to tell 5%

Age M = 47.0, SD = 9.5

Years of education M = 16, SD = 3.3

Years working as interpreter: M = 8.8, SD = 6.7, range 0.08-31

RESULTS

We explored patterns and trends in the data descriptively. Key findings were:

- In line with recommendations, most of the respondents agreed that is important to prepare for the interviews as well as to build and maintain rapport during the interview.
- Whereas most interviewers favored open questions over closed questions, approximately half of the interpreters favored closed questions and considered closed questions to be as effective as open question. Almost ¼ of the interpreters found it necessary to ask very specific questions to obtain the relevant information, whereas only a third of the interviewers agreed with this.
- Most respondents found their work meaningful and important, but also emotionally draining and challenging.
- The respondents described various practical challenges in their work (e.g., lack of time and information).

Figure 1. Interview Dynamics

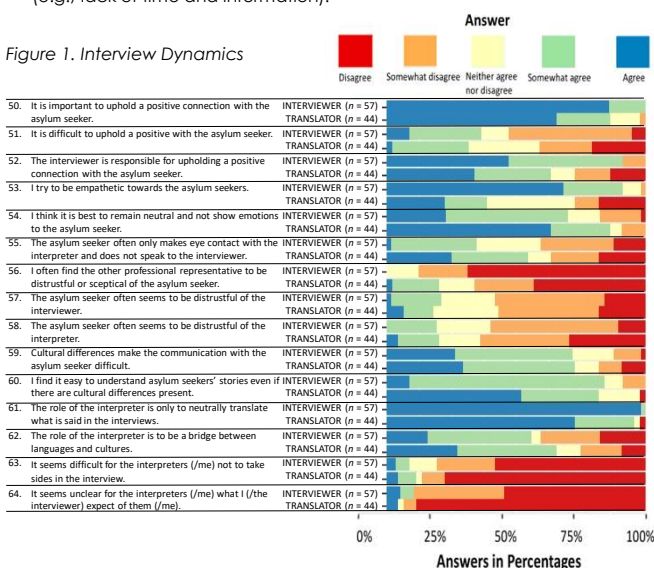


Figure 2. Interview Content

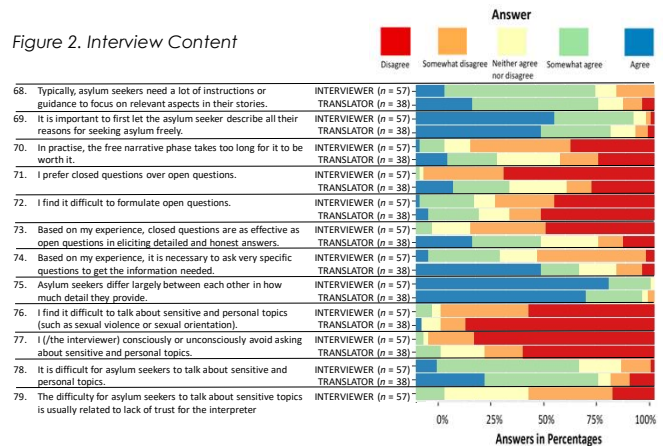
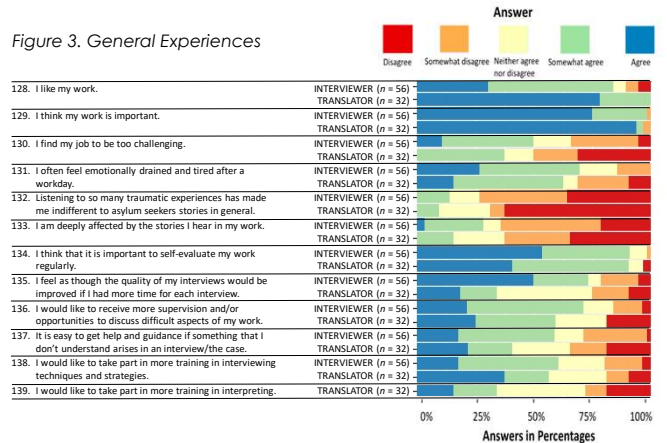


Figure 3. General Experiences



CONCLUSIONS

- In general, the views of both the interviewers and interpreters were in line with best practice guidelines.
- The interpreters' reported preference of closed questions poses a risk to interview quality.
- More collaboration between the interviewer and interpreter and training of interpreters in interviewing techniques is needed. Interviewers and interpreters should be provided more support and training.
- Due to methodological limitations, the current results can mainly be used as a base for further research.

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