

PSYCH-AID

**PSYCHOLOGY AT THE FRONTIERS:
ASYLUM INTERVIEWING
AND DECISION MAKING**

**Nordic Asylum Law and Data Lab, Copenhagen
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psych-aid@abo.fi

<https://sites.abo.fi/psych-aid/>



Outline

- About us
- Current projects
- The Finnish Immigration Service datasets
- Future projects and data

About us

Centre of Excellence at Åbo Akademi University
Funded by the Åbo Akademi University Foundation
2024–2028

8 researchers + assistants
International steering group





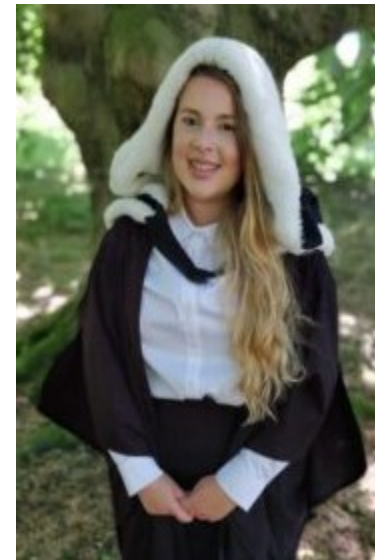
Prof. Jan Antfolk
Project Lead



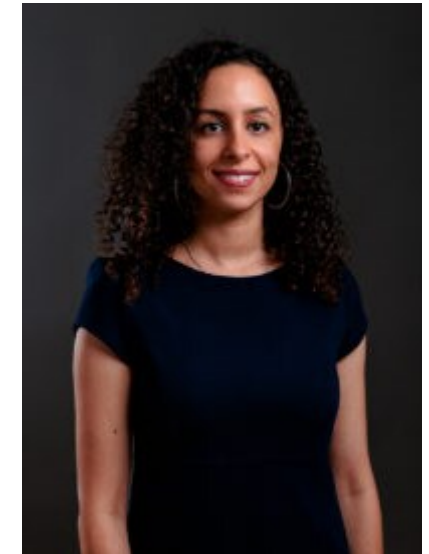
Prof. of Prac. Julia Korkman
Co-Investigator



Dr Jenny Skrifvars
Post-Doc Researcher



Dr Laura Stevens
Post-Doc Researcher



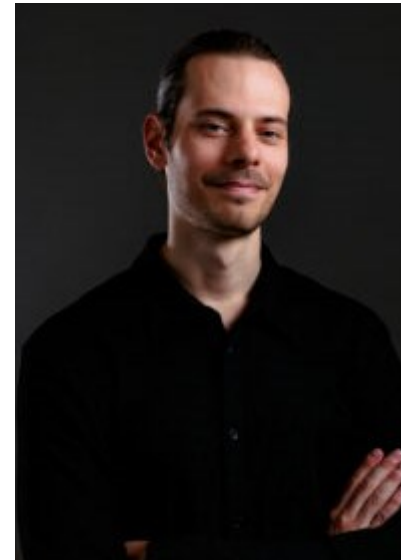
Hedayat Selim
PhD Researcher



Obed Appiah
PhD Researcher



Malin Ekelund
PhD Researcher



Rasmus Ahlgren
PhD Researcher



Anna Ilmoni
Research Assistant

Aims of Psych-AID

1. Interviewing techniques
2. Credibility assessments
3. Claims based on social identity
4. Legal standards
5. Training programs

Interviewing techniques in asylum interviews

Could use of techniques developed and validated for forensic interviews improve asylum interview quality?

- Aims:
 - Evaluate and potentially improve rapport building in asylum interviews
 - To compare different interviewing techniques (e.g. CI, Model Statement)
 - Also eventually compare to current practices in Finland
 - Train officials in use of the best interviewing techniques
 - See if this training improves quality of interviews

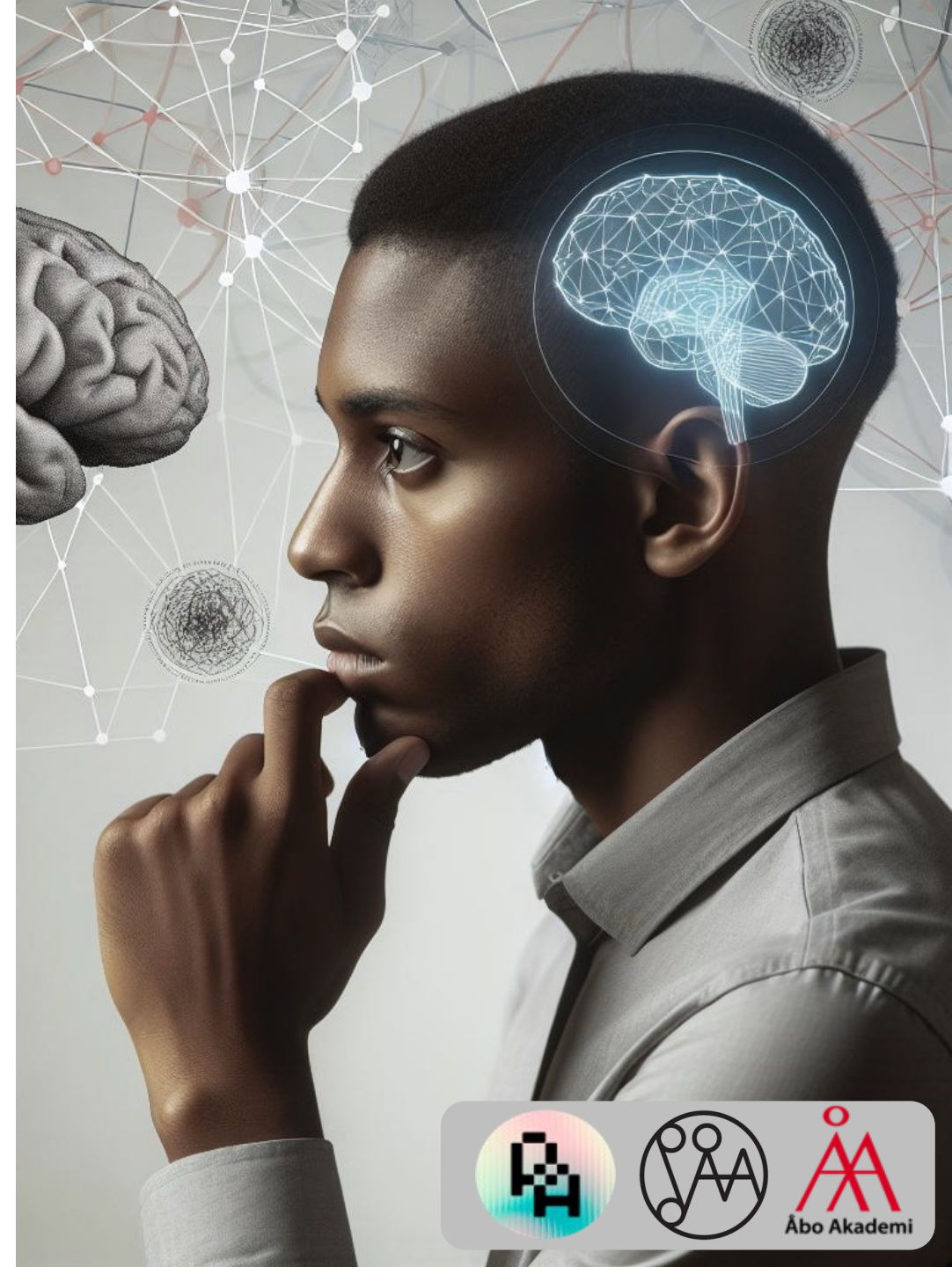


Asylum decision-making

Decision-making and credibility assessment.

Understanding the underlying psychological factors that affect asylum case assessment and conclusions.

Examining the validity of credibility assessment tools and criteria used by asylum officials.



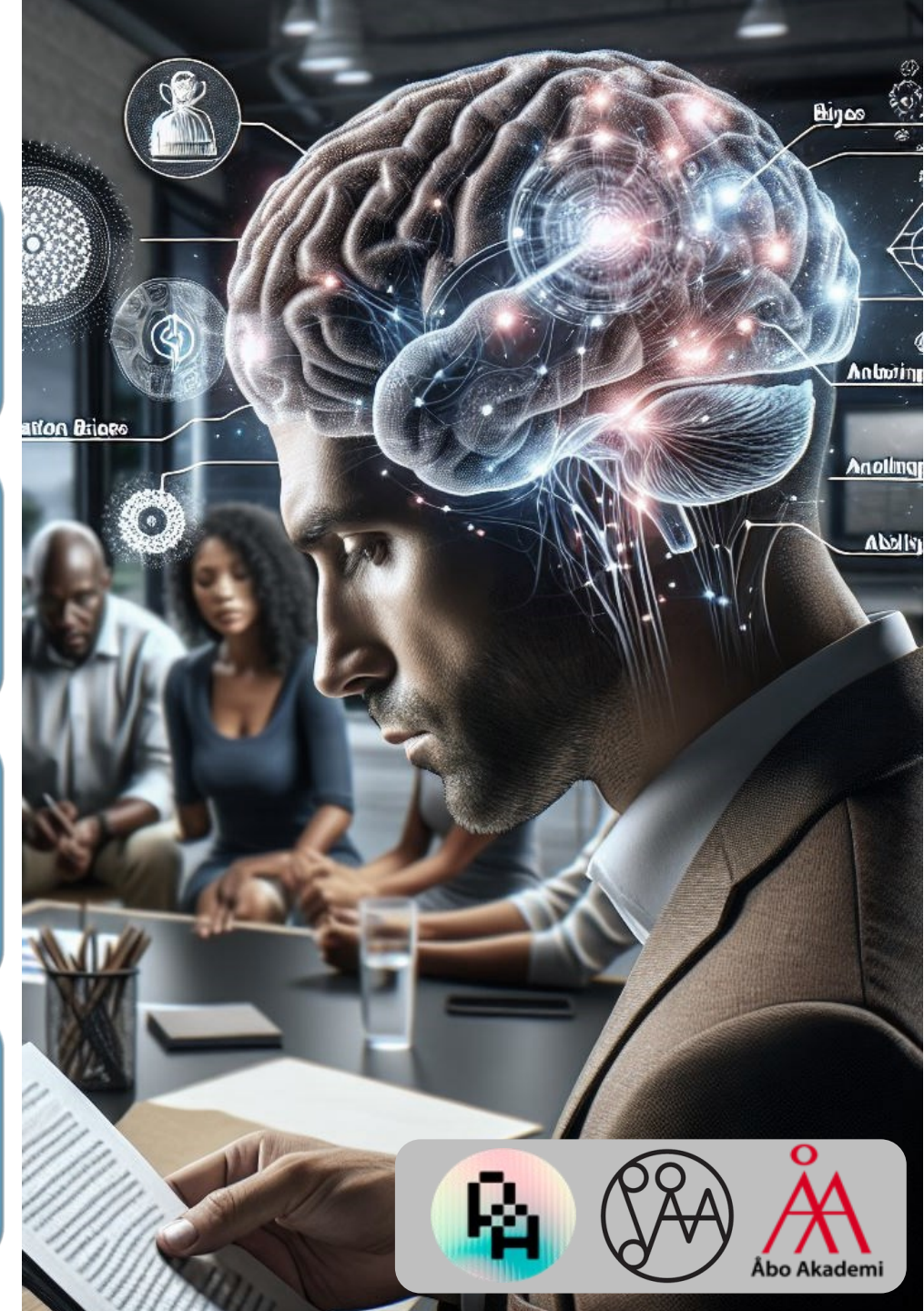
Current Study

Surveying Asylum officials in Europe about their beliefs on the nature of cognitive bias and its influence in their work.

Investigate how training and experience affect these beliefs.

Examine the training officials receive on cognitive bias and the strategies they implement to reduce its negative influence.

This helps us understand the needs of officials and make recommendations for training on cognitive bias.



Asylum claims based on social identity – the influence of stereotypes

The stereotype-matching hypothesis: asylum officials may be more likely to find claims credible when they align with their existing stereotypes, and less likely to believe claims that don't – even when those claims are true

- Expression stereotypes: e.g., gender non-conforming
- Psychological mechanisms influencing credibility
- Sexual identity formation stereotypes: e.g., to feel shame



Dataset I from the Finnish Immigration Service

- We received a randomized sample of 200 official asylum casefiles (2017-2018).
- It consisted of a decision letter and transcripts of all interviews. The content of the cases: country of origin, year of application, outcome (granted asylum, granted other protection status, rejected, or expired/not investigated), and number of previous applications or appeals.
- Research has focused on e.g: question style, question type, and question order, length and content of responses, psychological assumptions underlying credibility assessments
- Key takeaways: These results emphasize the importance of training asylum officials in evidence-based interviewing and decision-making to ensure correct asylum decisions.



Dataset II from the Finnish Immigration Service

- 218 asylum cases based on sexual orientation from the Finnish Immigration Service from 2014–2019
- Research has focused on (1) interviewing techniques; (2) written justifications for rejections; (3) reasons for delaying the disclosure of sexual orientation.
- Key takeaways: Current practice only partly adheres to established evidence in psychology.
- Interview questions were non-confrontational and supportive, leading question types were rarely used. However, most questions were closed and fact-checking.
- Justifications for rejecting the credibility of the claims was lack of sufficient detail. Also holding unsupported sexual identity assumptions such as expectation of rejecting organized religion.
- Reason for delaying the disclosure of their claim was not knowing that sexual orientation was a valid ground for seeking asylum. Concerns about confidentiality and discomfort with disclosure.



Future projects + datasets from MIGRI

- Evaluations of past training programs
 - Dataset of interviews and decision before and after training
- New set of case reports (interviews and decisions)
- Separate set of interviews & decisions involving
 - Child applicants
 - Claims based on religion
- Audio recordings of interviews with matching decisions
- Training program in interviewing and decision making
- Training program in child interviewing
- Development of interviewing practices
 - Goal: develop recommendations on interviewing strategies and techniques

